

**CASE STUDIES OF LOW SOCIOECONOMIC MEXICAN AMERICAN
GRADUATES IN THE AUSTIN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL
DISTRICT: WHY THEY DIDN'T DROP OUT**

A Record of Study

by

LUCILA DIAZ DUNCAN

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

December 2006

Major Subject: Educational Administration

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ABSTRACT

Case Studies of Low Socioeconomic Mexican American Graduates
in the Austin Independent School District:

Why They Didn't Drop Out. (December 2006)

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Research data revealed that Mexican Americans have the highest dropout rate of any other Hispanic group. Since Hispanics are becoming the highest minority group in the U.S., the primary purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate what helped third generation low socioeconomic Mexican American A.I.S.D. students successfully graduate from high school. Three former students were selected from three different high schools. The researcher collected data through individual interviews with each participant and with key informants such as parents and school personnel. Issues examined included participant perceptions of factors that kept them in school, the support systems they believed were important, and the challenges they encountered.

The overall findings revealed that the three participants had a strong sense of control, positive relationships with peers and school staff, parents who valued education, and strong school support through programs or personnel.

Recommendations for educators based on the findings include 1) staff

development on building relationships with students and communicating with parents, 2)

creation of nurturing and academically rigorous school environments.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the ones who made it and inspired me through their example --
my father, Lucio F. Diaz & my mother, Josefina B. Diaz.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am deeply grateful to the members of my doctoral committee, Dr. Linda Skrla, Dr. Yvonna Lincoln, Dr. Luana Zellner, and Dr. Rafael Lara-Alecio for their patience, guidance, and encouragement. Dr. Skrla, my committee chair, was always available and helpful especially when I encountered obstacles.

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I especially want to thank the participants in this study and their families. They were truly an inspiration. I appreciate their willingness to give of their time and share their stories so others could learn from their experiences.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Today, a large body of research focuses on the reasons why Mexican American students fail to graduate from high school and the conditions that cause them to dropout. Researchers cite poverty, disenfranchisement, or poor academic performance as some of the reasons behind Mexican Americans failing to stay in school (Goldberg, 1997; Ramirez, 1993; Riley & Pompa, 1998). Alatorre Alva and Padilla (1995) found that not all Mexican American youth who experience cultural turmoil or live in economically disadvantaged environments experience academic difficulties or dropout. Garza (1998) states, “Awareness is meaningless unless it inspires and is followed by change.” Thus, there is a need for urgency to move forward and add to the research about why some students do stay in school in spite of their *at-riskness*.

In the United States, the Mexican American people, who have been in America since the 1600s, make up the largest portion of the Hispanic population and, sadly, the largest portion of the Hispanic dropout population (Carrasquillo, 1991). According to some researchers, Mexican Americans have not been able to negotiate an educational system that is designed for the majority population (Guerra, 1970; Montero-Sieburth, 1993; President’s Commission, 1996; Valenzuela, 1999). Nonetheless, in spite of limited educational opportunities throughout the 20th century, some Mexican Americans have

This record of study follows the style and format of the *Journal of Educational Research*.

distinguished themselves as writers, professionals and statesmen. Dr. Blandina Cardenas, Henry Cisneros, Dr. Jose Cardenas, Sandra Cisneros, and Senator Henry B. Gonzalez are a few examples. What made them successful? With this question in mind, the main purpose of this study was twofold: 1) to find out how and why low socioeconomic Mexican American students defy the odds, and 2) to inspire the readers, practitioners, and policy makers to make the transition from an awareness state to action. Our success in Texas and the nation depends on our understanding why those youth who could have become disenfranchised by the educational system do succeed.

Statement of the Problem

Entitlement to a free public school education does not necessarily translate to just schooling conditions for all children, especially for poor and minority children (Kozol, 1991). Hispanics, who are projected to become the largest ethnic population in the United States by the early twenty-first century, are among the poorest minority groups. In the 1993 report by U. S. Department of Commerce Economics & Statistics Administration Bureau of the 1990 Census, Hispanics make up the largest group of school dropouts. In 1999, the U. S. Department of Education National Center for Educational Statistics reported that only 44 percent of Mexican Americans had completed high school. If this trend continues, the country's soon-to-be largest minority will be unprepared to meet the challenges of a continued democratic existence in our country. They will be unprepared for employment in a global, high-tech economy and

unprepared to engage in civic life. In order for our nation to continue as a leader in the world economy, it must take pro-active approaches to educate all its youth (HDP, 1998; Lockwood & Secada, 1999; President's Advisory Commission, 1996; Wisconsin Center for Educational Research [WCER], 1996).

My own father, a third generation Mexican American from a low socioeconomic family, attributed his desire to finish school, and college, to several factors: his involvement in sports; his peer group; support from various adults -- in and out of school; his hard work to do well academically; and the support of his grandfather and his parents. Of the eight children in the family, he was the first one to graduate from high school and the only one who finished college, earning his Bachelor of Arts and Masters Degree. Four of his siblings dropped out of high school and two dropped out of college. My father was a successful high school graduate during a time when many young people dropped out in order to help out at home. Even though my aunts described him as the one who loved learning, at one time he expressed a desire to quit high school and find a job as his brother had done. His father tried to dissuade him by pointing out how tired his brother was from doing manual labor, but my father was not persuaded. After much pleading, the decision was that he could quit school. The only condition was that my grandfather would select the workplace and type of work my father would do. My grandfather still worked on a ranch, so he gave him the hardest work there - - putting up fences. After a week of work, my father decided to return to school. This was my grandfather's way of supporting his son's schooling.

Academically, my father felt that his own grandfather influenced and supported

him. His grandfather taught him to read in Spanish at a very young age and read with him daily. His mother taught him math. According to my aunts, all the siblings had the same opportunity, but only my father would sit with him and read daily. After graduating from high school, he wanted to attend college as his friends were doing. His father was not in favor of this, since he felt they could not afford to send him, and he needed to start working to help the family out. Even though his father valued a high school education, he did not see a need for him to go to college, and voiced his objections continuously. The owner of the ranch where he had grown up and where my grandfather still worked stepped in and lent my father the money. For his entire life, my father spoke of this man with respect and admiration. He saw him as the one who mentored his future. There were many mentors along the way that helped my father. They either provided opportunities for him to work, or at times gave him a place to live.

This is but one story of how a potential dropout stayed in school. However, the research focusing on the reasons why some low socioeconomic Mexican Americans remain in school and graduate during a time when there is a high dropout rate among Mexican Americans generally is limited.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to find out what strategies hold the greatest promise for reducing the dropout rate of Hispanic American students in the Austin Independent School District. The research is lacking in the area of Mexican American student success. It is especially sparse when identifying factors that would explain why

some Mexican American students do quite well in school and others with the same sociocultural background fail. How do some of the students negotiate the socioeconomic and cultural differences within an educational context that is monolingualistic and monocultural?

The objectives of the study are:

1. To discover the overall experience of former low socioeconomic Hispanic American students who attended Austin I. S. D. schools and graduated from high school.
2. To identify reasons why former low socioeconomic Mexican American student graduates stayed in school.
3. To identify factors that contributed to retaining the students in school.
4. To identify situations or factors that caused low socioeconomic Mexican American students the greatest concern.
5. To assess the cited factors associated with success in order to see if school staff can replicate them for other students.

Research Questions

1. What factors keep low socioeconomic Mexican American students in the Austin I. S. D. from dropping out of school?
2. What support systems do low socioeconomic Mexican American high school graduates identify as important?
3. What challenges do low socioeconomic Mexican American high school

students encounter?

Methodology

The researcher conducted case studies of three low socioeconomic Mexican Americans who graduated from an Austin Independent School District high school within the last five years. Case studies can provide the researcher a holistic understanding of how Mexican American students interacted with the institution and the supports provided that helped them stay in school. Stake (1994) stated,

When the researcher's narrative provides opportunity for vicarious experience, readers extend their memories of happenings. Naturalistic, ethnographic case materials, to some extent, parallel actual experience, feeding into the most fundamental processes of awareness and understanding. (p. 240)

The case study method will also allow the researcher to examine subjective accounts of the schooling process as interpreted by the participants (Alatorre Alva & Padilla, 1995; Gándara, 1995; Garnier, Stein, Jacobs, 1997; Garza, 1998; Seda & Bixler-Marquez, 1994). This method is congruent with the basic features and premises of qualitative methods and is congruent with studies that seek to answer how and why questions, and it is also congruent with studies in which the researcher has little control over the research setting (Merriam, 1998).

As researchers such as Lincoln, Guba, and Erlandson have expressed, naturalistic inquiry is one of the best modes of research to acquire what Rainer Martens describes as "legitimate knowledge" (as cited in Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, Allen, 1993, p. 7). In naturalistic inquiry, there is also an assumption that there are multiple

constructions of realities, rather than a single reality, to an experience. With that in mind, the researcher sought to present and understand the student participants' constructions of realities of the school versus the construction of the schooling process by those still in the school setting.

This study required delving into the minds and lives of the participants in order to explore what kept Mexican Americans in school while others dropped out. The interview process involved in the case study method gave the researcher the opportunity to hear the participants stories and their perceptions of what their school experience was like and what they believed helped them stay in school.

Participants

By selecting a multiple case study method, the researcher hoped to provide a more compelling interpretation, taking advantage of the strengths of naturalistic generalization (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998). The researcher used a cross-case analysis of the experiences of three separate case studies of Mexican American youths' experiences at three different schools in one school district. According to Merriam (1998), one must establish criteria for finding the best case study. Here are the criteria for the selection of the participants:

- Have attended Austin I. S. D. schools throughout their entire school experience.
- Are second or third generation Mexican Americans. This means either one or both parents are U. S. native born Americans of Mexican

descent.

- Qualified for the free or reduced lunch program.
- Graduated from an Austin I. S. D. high school in May or June, 1998 or 1999, with the rest of his/her class.

The purpose for selecting the participants from three separate high schools with different ethnic and socioeconomic demographics was to maximize the scope of the information obtained. By selecting high schools from three different parts of town, transferability may occur because of shared characteristics or experiences in the context of school (Erlandson et al., 1993). The study utilized demographic data from the Texas Education Agency Academic Excellence Indicators Survey to identify the Austin ISD high schools that would participate. The high schools selected were in three different areas of town: North, South, Southwest. The school located in the south part of the city had the highest percentage of Hispanic students in the district and a high percentage of low socioeconomic student population. The school located in the north part of the city had a similar number of low socioeconomic students as the south school but a lower percent of Hispanic students. The third high school had a significantly lower number of low socioeconomic students than the other two high schools but had a slightly higher percent of Hispanic students than the north school. The purpose for selecting different high schools from three different parts of the city was to see if any trends developed from interviews with the selected participants. The particular Hispanic group the researcher selected for this study was second or third generation, low socioeconomic Mexican Americans.

Use of Austin I.S.D. student records, and recommendations from teachers, counselors, and administrators of the identified school facilitated the identification of participants. School personnel (principals, counselors, teachers) received letters and telephone calls requesting their participation in the study. Selected graduates received letters and telephone calls asking if they wished to participate.

Data Collection

The in-depth, open-ended interview was the main technique for data collection. The interviews contained both structured and unstructured portions. However, for the purpose of triangulation, other sources of data, such as documentation, observation, and interviews with key informants, supported the participant interviews. Individual participants, parents, family members, teachers, principals, counselors, and/or other key informants identified by the participants and others as having a positive impact on their school experience served as the subjects of the interviews. The interview questions consisted of highly structured, semi-structured, and unstructured questions.

The procedures for data collection involved taping interviews, preplanning written interview notes, keeping written notes, recording critical incidents, keeping a reflective journal, and observing participants' homes or place of employment, when possible, as a way to build tacit knowledge and develop a sense of the participants world. (Elandson et al., 1993) The researcher incorporated the naturalistic inquiry methods of persistent observation and prolonged engagement.

Data Analysis

In a naturalistic study, the relationship between data collection and data analysis is inseparable (Erlandson et., 1993). As data collection occurred, the researcher began the data analyses. Analyses of the data occurred in order to facilitate the development of a working hypothesis or to see the emerging hypotheses. In this naturalistic inquiry study, the researcher used the same methods for data analysis as those used to build trustworthiness (Erlandson et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998). The researcher used the elements of unitizing data, emergent category designation, and negative case analysis (Erlandson et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). She incorporated the methods of triangulation of data, peer debriefing, and member checking. Since this is a multiple case study, there were two stages of analysis: a within-case analysis and a cross-case analysis.

Trustworthiness and Authenticity

The process of building trustworthiness in naturalistic inquiry is critical. The criteria for building trustworthiness are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation of the data collected through prolonged engagement in the field, persistent observation, interviews, reflective journal, and referential materials enhanced trustworthiness and credibility in the study. Member checks gave the participants an opportunity to review interviews and make additional contributions and clarifications. Peer debriefings with Mexican American colleagues helped to establish credibility.

This was a heuristic study since it brought into the fore the personal experience

and insights of the researcher, who is part of the Austin ISD school system and a Mexican American. For these reasons, safeguards were necessary for meeting ethical standards. The researcher assured privacy, confidentiality, and inclusiveness with the respondents. Since the language in the context may be different from the researcher's language, the study sought each individual's constructions and provided opportunity to develop shared constructions of the context. Stakeholders participated through on-going member checks to review and clarify constructions developed by the researcher, to add and/or revise these constructions. The researcher worked toward development of shared constructions with the stakeholders, using informed consent consistently throughout the study. This partnership offered opportunities for growth and empowerment of those involved in the study, which in turn built authenticity into the research (Erlandson et al., 1993).

Significance of the Study

Many studies have shown that school failure and dropping out are highly correlated with poverty, low levels of parent education, and limited exposure to English and literacy at home (Gándara, 1995; Garnier, Stein, & Jacobs, 1997; Riley & Pompa, 1998; Romo, 1998) yet many students do succeed. This study sought to add to the limited body of knowledge that can contribute to the success of Mexican American students in a public school setting. Educators are continually looking for and implementing programs to help retain Mexican American students in school, but don't often have the time to find out from the students themselves why they stayed in school.

By presenting three case studies of successful Hispanic students, I provide insights and recommendations for educators that might help them design programs or make changes necessary to keep Hispanic students in school. Those changes may not only help keep Mexican American students in school, but also help keep all students in school, thus contributing to the success of individual students, schools, and school districts and producing an educated citizenry for our nation as a whole.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

According to the President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans (1996) report, there are numerous success stories, model programs, and practices that have significantly improved scholastic attainment for Hispanic Americans. As the economy demands a more educated workforce, it is extremely important that as educators we implement practices and programs that have proven to be successful with Hispanic youth. It is critical today for our youth to complete school and indeed go beyond a high school education. It is imperative that we decrease the dropout rate of our Hispanic youth, and decrease practices and programs that impede their success.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the reader with an overview of the existing literature regarding the schooling experiences of Mexican American youth and reasons why some of these youth successfully complete high school. In order to provide an understanding regarding the success in staying in school of some low socioeconomic, second or third generation, Mexican American youths, it is important to discuss the following key elements: first, what the literature says about the experiences of the Mexican American child in school; second, the characteristics of the high school drop out; third, the beliefs and behaviors of successful students and how they negotiate the context of school; fourth, the beliefs and behaviors of adults toward Mexican American students in and out of schools; and fifth, the schools or programs that are successfully retaining Mexican American youths in school.

The Mexican American Child in School

Historically, the experience of Mexican American youth in school differs according to the number of years the parent has been in the United States. Mexican Americans are not a homogenous group and generational differences may affect the ways in which their parents perceive or support their children's school experience (Nieto, 1996; Okagaki & Frensch, 1998; Romo & Falbo, 1996; Rumsberger, 1991). For this reason, categorizing all Mexican Americans together will not allow us to understand the differences among them related to parent expectations, cultural perspectives, school culture, and motivation (Nieto, 1996; Okagaki & Frensch, 1998). Within the Mexican American ethnic group, it is necessary to be cognizant that behavioral differences may occur in the cultural group depending on the various degrees of acculturation of the specific subgroups, whether first, second, third, or fourth generation Mexican Americans, to the Anglo culture (McClintock, E., Bayard, M.P., & McClintock, C., 1983; Montero-Sieburth, M., 1993; Rumsberger, 1991). As we bear in mind that there are various subgroups of Mexican Americans, the question we must then ask is: What Hispanics are leaving school?

The U. S. Department of Education National Center for Education (2000) report states that first generation and second generation Hispanics had a dropout rate of 16 percent. Some researchers have reported that first and second generation Mexican-Americans whose families lived in the United States for two or three generations drop out more frequently than recent immigrants. First generation Mexican Americans are defined as those born in the United States who have one or both parents born in Mexico.

Second generation Mexican Americans are those who are born in the United States to parents who were both born in the United States. Of the 50 percent of Hispanics who attained a high school diploma, only 44.2 percent of the group were Mexican Americans, while other Hispanic groups had higher completion statistics: Puerto Ricans 53 percent, Cubans 57 percent, and Spaniards 77 percent.

The first generation Mexican American students who are recent immigrants, or whose parents are recent immigrants, have a different view of their educational experience than those who have been here longer. The parent's attitude about the importance of education is passed down to their children. The recent immigrant and their parents see obtaining an education and graduating from school as an opportunity to get a better job and to be better off than their parents. They typically have a very positive attitude about school, the teachers, and other school authorities. This pro-school ethos leads Mexican immigrant students to be more likely to graduate from high school. (Davis, 1990; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001)

In contrast, native-born Mexican Americans do not see their educational experience through the same eyes as the Mexican immigrant (Romo & Falbo, 1996; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999). For Mexican American students, academic achievement is often linked to a number of sociocultural values such as educational and occupational attainment levels of parents, family income and composition, and ethnic minority status. The behavior and attitudes displayed by the native born Mexican American student in the classroom and the neighborhood often cause negative perceptions of them in the schools and these behaviors also cause the

Mexican immigrant student to have a negative perception of the native born student (Romo & Falbo, 1996). Valenzuela (1999) stated that second generation, and above, Mexican American students in her studies often perceived and interpreted teachers' and administrators' actions as prejudicial toward them because of their minority status. They believed that if they had been white, they would have been treated differently. The students felt disconnected and disenfranchised from adults in the school due to a lack of understanding from their teachers. Students in several studies have reported that they are misunderstood, made to feel dumb because they are Mexican or pressured by friends to drop out. Since they have not made a connection to school, the students give in to the pressure of not showing too much interest in schoolwork because they are seen as "nerdy" or being "Anglo." The cultural mismatch in the values of Mexican American children and those required within the educational system are often responsible for the difficulties that they experience in the classroom (Alatorre Alva & Padilla, 1995; Carrasquillo, 1991; Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Kagan, 1983; Nieto, 1996; Valenzuela, 1999).

One of the cultural mismatches cited dealt with the competition and individual achievement encouraged and expected by teachers in many classrooms. Competition and individual achievement are seen as important values in the Anglo American culture which in turn is the prevalent culture of the schools (Albert, 1983). Kagan (1983) cited in his research that Mexican American children have a more cooperative social orientation, which goes contrary to some classroom structures where individual achievement and competition are viewed as important. Even though the third generation Mexican American children were more easily acculturated to the Anglo American

competitive norms of the school, there was still resistance to assimilate. Their cultural values of cooperativeness and equality were still maintained. The structures of the classrooms at times do not lend themselves for Mexican American students to be successful. The student's lack of competitiveness, or lack of trying to make himself number one, is often interpreted as lack of motivation by school personnel. According to Kagan (1983), in a study of the social orientation among Mexican American children, he stated:

While there may be no direct test of the relation of social orientation to achievement in various classroom structures, it appears that the superior performance of Mexican American children in cooperative classrooms may be due to their more cooperative social orientation. If so, it can be concluded that traditional, competitive and individualistic classroom structures are systematically biased against Mexican American children and are culturally undemocratic. (p.163)

Some schools have played and continue to play a critical role in the lack of success of Mexican American students. This is not to say that they have purposely and willingly perpetuated practices that block students' success, but through their behaviors or lack of action, they have done so. Case studies and interviews with Mexican American students, parents, and teachers, plus observations in schools, have illuminated practices that discourage students from continuing. Practices that disconnect students from the schools are numerous:

1. Students are discouraged from taking honor courses.
2. Staff members do not return parent's calls.
3. Teachers have low expectations for students.
4. Teachers do not communicate with the parents when students are

being successful.

5. Students are expelled frequently.

6. Teachers give up using motivating approaches due to the lack of classroom control (Albert, 1983; Carrasquillo, 1991; Delgado-Gaitan, 1987; Nieto, 1996; Romo & Falbo, 1996; Valenzuela, 1999).

Valenzuela (1999) describes an event in which school staff told students that they were not going to be successful due to their immaturity, lack of motivation, and inability to follow rules. She stated that this type of verbal abuse was not uncommon at the school.

The types of schools that the students attend influence their academic achievement and success. Minorities, especially Hispanics, are affected by their place of residence and social class. Due to the areas where they are concentrated, the Hispanic students are more likely to be concentrated in minority schools. In these large segregated schools, achievement levels tend to be lower. There is a poorer school climate, more student discipline and staff problems. Many times poor schooling conditions and experiences fail to engage some students. The students are less academically engaged, less socially engaged, less engaged in formal social activities, and have fewer friends. The students tend to cut classes, are frequently absent, and have discipline problems. Romo & Falbo (1996) found that when teacher expectations are low, the students lose interest in the curriculum, develop negative reactions toward school, and do not work to their potential.

Another factor in Texas impacting the perceptions of student achievement for Hispanic students is the state education agency requirement that students be labeled “at-

risk” since meeting criteria such as being low socioeconomic, limited English speaking, or bilingual results in a large number of Hispanic students being labeled. Being identified as at-risk is a commonplace characteristic of under represented student populations, yet this label is frequently used to describe Hispanic students, who make up one of the fastest growing populations in the United States. While the label of at-risk does not in and of itself characterize individual students, students who are labeled at-risk may be further disadvantaged by this inclusive label, more than if they met one of the predicting factors applied to them such as poverty, single-parent family, or retention in grade, or low socioeconomic status. Once a label is attached, schools lower expectations for the labeled students rather than using the information to insure that they provide a rigorous approach in their teaching of the curriculum to the students.

In the fall of 1988, Texas law mandated that parents be notified that their children were designated as “at risk” of dropping out of school. Romo and Falbo (1996b) found that not all parents understood what the designation meant so they did not take steps necessary to help their child stay in school. Some parents did understand and took action to solve the child’s school problems. Unfortunately, the school district participating in the current study was somewhat at fault with respect to parents lack of understanding the seriousness of the designation. A letter sent did not specify strongly enough that their child met the criteria. When parents do not understand how it relates to their own child, they cannot challenge the system or know what they can do to help their child. Consequently, at risk students are placed in a tracking system that has a less rigorous, differentiated curriculum. (Gibson, Gándara , & Koyama, 2004; Montero-

Sieburth, 1993) Furthermore, tracking practices or curricular divisions set up in many high schools tend to impact the low socioeconomic Mexican American students more than other students, thus depriving them of potentially positive school experiences, opportunities for scholarships, and a way to achieve the “American Dream” (Gándara, 1995; Gibson, Gándara & Koyama, 2004; Guerra, 1970; Romo & Falbo, 1996; Valenzuela, 1999).

Misconceptions and problems encountered by Mexican American students have ranged from students lack of understanding about how to interpret the behavior and interactions of their teachers, to teachers not understanding the reasons for student behavior they describe as unmotivated, apathetic, unruly, and disrespectful (Valenzuela, 1999; Nieto, 1996; Romo & Falbo, 1996). For all students, the crowd the student belongs to and what the general impression is of that crowd’s attitudes toward school will influence teachers’ expectations. This view is particularly held of ethnic-minority students, thus promoting low expectations for the students by their teachers and due to what they perceive as an uncaring attitude about school and learning. When students misbehave or do not turn in assignments, the teacher does not contact the parents or follow up with the student due to their perceptions that students and parents do not care (Gibson et al., 2004; Valenzuela, 1999). The values and practices in the classrooms and schools develop the students’ behaviors, beliefs, and aspirations for their education. For low socioeconomic students, their interaction with their teachers, administrators, and counselors can create the context in which the students will negotiate the pressures of staying in school. Administrators do not have time to spend in classrooms and often miss

opportunities to observe what students and teachers face. When problems arise with Hispanic students, they expel them instead of finding ways to work help the students work them out. This reaction comes from the pressure to eliminate violence on campuses and keep order in the schools (Romo & Falbo, 1996).

Academic achievement also plays an important part in the motivation and eventual school failure or success of students. A child's inability to read frustrates their ambition and morale, so he or she compensates with antisocial behavior (Alatorre Alva & Padilla, 1995; Garneir et al., 1997; Guerra, 1970). Children who have difficulties academically tend to drop out early and have discipline problems in school (Gándara, 1995; Garneir, et al., 1997; Winfield, 1994). In Texas, all students are expected to pass the state assessment in order to graduate from high school. The Hispanic students scores in Austin, in 1999, were lower than the white and Asian students' scores. Hispanics also have a higher percent of students not passing one or more of the state assessments thus making it more challenging for them to graduate. In 1999, 60% of the Hispanic students graduated from high school compared to 65% of the African American student population and 85% of the white student population in Austin. (AEIS Reports) We can assume that the majority of the Hispanic population being tested is Mexican American since Texas was part of Mexico and it borders Mexico.

Relationships also play an important part in the success or failure of many students, particularly minority students. The relationship between children and their teachers, parents, or other adults in the school, plays an important part in elementary school. Students listen to their parents and seek the approval of the adults in and out of

school. As the students move into middle school and high school, an additional factor influences their success or failure: their peers. In high school, teachers and other adults in the student's life continue to impact academic learning, but their relationship with other students becomes especially important. The influence of peers and peer relations in shaping school outcomes of Mexican American students is notable. Studies by Valenzuela (1999) and Gibson et al., (2004) found that peers, close or distant, of adolescents influence students' participation, engagement, and achievement during high school in a positive or negative way. Valenzuela (1999) found that a group of students helped one of their peers stay in school by providing him support and bringing him into their own family circles. Peers, specifically close friends and cliques, provide moral support and integrate the "social glue" that helps some Mexican and Mexican American students gain a better understanding of school. In high schools, Mexican and Mexican American students more than others tend to select their closest friends from their own ethnic group. This is especially predominant in schools where curricular tracking already establishes tendencies to socialize students like themselves. This limits their association with students from other ethnic groups, particularly those who might be more socially advantaged.

Self segregation is particularly evident among low socioeconomic Mexican American students and limited English students who feel uncomfortable about speaking out in front of middle-class White peers, not wishing to appear "dumb" because they perceive that they are the only ones who don't understand. This feeling leads them to enroll in lower level classes even though they need the tougher classes to get into

college. Adolescents tend to develop similar attitudes about school and perform similarly over time as their peer group, thus impacting academic performance. In their research Gibson et al., (2004) found that Mexican American students who were very popular students such as star athletes, seemed to be able to move across high- and low-achieving peer groups without begin stigmatized by other Mexican Americans.

Achieving Mexican American students who wanted to stay with their “homeboys” found their achievement for success was significantly compromised. According to Gándara (1995), high academic achievement can be a liability in gaining status among their peer group for Latino inner city youth. On the other hand, Mexican American girls tended to have higher aspirations than they conveyed to their peer group. Valenzuela(1999) found that Mexican American females made higher grades and did their homework in every generation. The inability of schools to break down ethnic and academic barriers continues to decrease the sense of belonging in school for the students.

In their case studies, Romo and Falbo (1996b) and Valenzuela (1999) found that third generation Mexican American youth did not consider themselves to be Mexican and often reject the cultural connection between themselves and the Mexican immigrant students. This caused problems such as fights in some of the schools that had high numbers of Mexican immigrant students and Mexican American students. Both types of students in their study belonged to different cliques. The students who had the hardest time assimilating to the school culture were second generation Mexican American youth, those whose parents were from Mexico but who themselves had been born in the United States.

Romo and Falbo (1996b) also found that low socioeconomic students had problems finding pro-school peer groups to belong to, unlike the White American students from the same economic status. Students feared doing well because they did not want to be ridiculed by their peers and be called “nerds.” One of the boys in their study hid his school achievement from neighborhood friends, and another boy hid his homework or wouldn’t turn it in because he would be called a “school boy.”

Some school staffs believe that Mexican Americans’ parents do not care about school and their children’s progress, or their lack of motivation to succeed. This belief contributes to the attitudes of school personnel toward this ethnic group, thus impacting the expectations and standards of performance for the students (Guerra, 1970; Nieto, 1996; Romo & Falbo, 1996; Valenzuela, 1999). This negative view is critical, since many researchers have identified parent involvement as one of the factors that increases student achievement and staying in school (Nieto, 1996; Okagaki & Frensch, 1998; Romo Falbo, 1996b). School personnel’s misconceptions will continue unless administrators and teachers actively undertake the task of learning about their students’ social and cultural differences.

Parents of low socioeconomic students often have little formal education, which prevents them from having the higher paying jobs. To make ends meet, these parents often work two jobs and can’t take time off to come to school and advocate for their child due to the fear of losing their job. Consequently since they are away from home when the children leave for school or come back home from school, they are unable to monitor their child’s school attendance, whether the child is doing the homework, or if

they are having any difficulties at school. They are not around to observe their child's emotional reactions about school so they don't recognize when there are problems. At times, notes from school are difficult for them to read due to their lack of reading skills and the education jargon that is in the letter. The least educated parents often have the most difficult time overcoming administrative obstacles within the schools. This discourages them from advocating for their children. Another problem that arises is that some students do not want their parents to come to school because they are ashamed of them. They keep notices and information out of the parents' hands so parents are unable to communicate with the school. They do not perceive themselves as being able to do anything about it. Some parents feel powerless and have lost control of their child. The child does not listen to them and is influenced by friends in gangs or by boyfriends. These students drop out even though their parents might have thought they had a chance to graduate (Romo & Falbo, 1996).

Another problem encountered by some parents was the inability to help their child with work due to their own low educational level. This at times kept them from coming to conferences at the school and meeting with teachers, thus preventing them from understanding the expectations of the school (Alatorre Alva & Padilla, 1995; Okagaki & Frensch, 1998; Romo & Falbo, 1996). This is an area where schools could be more helpful. Parents who are ready to advocate for their children feel inadequate about going to the schools and communicating with personnel. At other times, their own experiences in school shadow their perceptions about how the school will receive their questions and visits. This creates a perceptual incongruence between the home and

school.

Successful Students

Many Mexican American students are academically invulnerable, sustaining high levels of achievement, but large gaps exist in understanding the factors and processes that determine this (Alatorre Alva & Padilla, 1995; Nieto, 1996). The resolution of such conflicts between the home and school culture may depend on the personal or environmental resources of the student--some researchers define this as “resiliency.” Romo and Falbo (1996) found that students often have to negotiate or navigate the bounds of three kinds of cultures: the home, the adult culture of the school system, and the student culture of each school. In order to negotiate and navigate the three kinds of cultures successfully, studies on invulnerable students suggest that resiliency will depend on several key issues:

- personal characteristics of the student: attitudes, social skills, and knowledge;
- family experiences: positive, supportive;
- environmental or protective resources: supports provided by school staff, communities, friends, families (Alatorre Alva & Padilla, 1995; Fine & Schwebel, 1994; Garnier, et al., 1997; Romo & Falbo, 1996; Winfield, 1994).

Cultural adaptation can be difficult and stressful for Mexican American students. The difficulty comes when, during the process of acculturation, they are struggling to

form an identity that integrates the old and new features of a cultural reference group (Alatorre Alva & Padilla, 1995). For some students, Romo and Falbo (1996) found that student cultures in schools are very powerful in influencing student behavior and in helping them integrate into the new culture. For some students, this new influence or culture group was more powerful than the home culture or the adult school culture.

Students who are successful in school choose groups that support their views of who they are in the context of school. If they believe they are Mexican Americans versus *Mejicanos*, they often associate with students who may retain some Mexican values at home such as respecting elders, and helping the younger children, as well as some of the cultural aspects such as celebrating special events (Valenzuela, 1999). They negotiate the expectations of the home culture and the school culture successfully. One of the many strategies that supportive peer groups will initiate is the formation of after school homework groups. They also often encourage each other when they are meeting with difficulties (Berkowitz, Chwast, & Shattuck, 1971; Cuellar, 1992; Romo & Falbo, 1996; Valenzuela, 1999).

In her study of Mexican American youths in a Houston high school, Valenzuela (1999) found that peer groups were very important to the students, and much of their success or failure was replicated throughout the group. Groups in the Houston high school studied formed according to their native origins. The students who had been born in the United States, but whose parents were from Mexico, had the most difficulty adjusting to the school culture and home culture. On the other hand, low socioeconomic, native born Mexican Americans tended to socialize together and accommodate to the

demands of the home and school culture. They helped and encouraged each other.

Parents of one of the group members even became the adopted parent of the group.

Successful or invulnerable students generally tend to demonstrate good social skills and are empathetic towards others such as immigrant students or Mexican origin students (Valenzuela, 1999). Students involved in athletics are also successful and have a supportive peer group that crosses economic and ethnic lines. The support received by their peers and coaches were congruent with the resilience factors needed to negotiate the school culture and demands (Okagaki & Frensch, 1998; Romo & Falbo, 1996).

Several studies (Carrasquillo, 1991; Cuellar, 1992; Hispanic Dropout Project, 1998; Nieto, 1996; Romo & Falbo, 1996; Winfield, 1994) have also shown that successful students have at least one significant adult in their lives who provided encouragement or support. This adult does not necessarily have to be the parent, but in most cases it is (Lockwood, 1996; Okagaki & Frensch, 1998; Lockwood & Secada, 1999). For Mexican American low socioeconomic students, the most influential parent was the mother, and in case studies of successful migrant Mexican Americans, Garza (1997) found that the students received their support from home. This consistent support contributed to their acquiring the resilience necessary to work through the challenges presented by school policies, administrators, staff, and their family's mobility. For low socioeconomic students, their interaction with their teachers, administrators, and counselors can create the context in which the students will negotiate the pressures of staying in school. This is important when they encounter the conflict between their friends and the school, because they are choosing to be good students. If their

experience in school is positive, and they are doing well academically, they have to decide whether it is worth being rejected by their neighborhood friends. The reason for having to make this decision is the importance that Mexican American youth place in having the support of their parents, peers, teachers, and/or other caring adults (Alatorre Alva & Padilla, 1995; Romo & Falbo, 1996; Lockwood & Secada, 1999; Paloma, 1990; Seda & Bixler-Marquez, 1994; Valenzuela, 1999).

Beliefs and Behaviors of Adults In and Out of School: Parents

In an interview in 1985, my father answered the question “What advice would you give the younger generation?” His response was, “Get an education!” Throughout the literature, one can see that the role of adults in the lives of children is critically important. Children who exhibit resiliency have parents who participate in their education, direct their everyday tasks, and set limits for them (Fine & Schwebel, 1994; Garza, 1998; Paloma, 1990; Winfield, 1994). Parents of high-achieving Mexican American students have very clear expectations about their children’s success in school, which they clearly communicate to their children; and they do not accept any grades lower than A’s and B’s. These parents have learned how to negotiate their way through the school system in order to get schools to provide the resources necessary for their children to succeed. As parents, they believe it is important to have good relationships with their children and to know their interests and goals. They expect their children to extend their learning further than just a high school education, often voicing their hopes that their children complete college, some even talking about graduate school. They set

a higher minimum boundary on school attainment than do parents of low-achieving students (Alatorre Alva & Padilla, 1995; Fine & Schwebel, 1994; Gándara, 1995; Okagaki & Frensch, 1998; Paloma, 1990; Romo & Falbo, 1996; Winfield, 1994).

Unfortunately, for low socioeconomic parents, just having high expectations and encouraging children to get a good education does not always bring to fruition the goals parents have set. Parents who did not come into the school and show the school's expected interest were unsuccessful in helping their child improve. Yet, Okagaki and Frensch (1998) found in their work to better understand the beliefs and behaviors of Mexican American parents that parents of low-achieving students have the same aspirations and beliefs as parents of high achieving students. The parents of low achievers feel that education is very important and see it as a way to get a good job. This view of educational opportunity for their children is a consistent finding in their study after having interviewed parents. They value education and want their children to do well. Part of the difficulty for some parents is not knowing the requirements in course work or academic rigor necessary for their children to move on to post-secondary institutions and be successful (Okagaki & Frensch, 1998; Romo & Falbo, 1996; Valenzuela, 1999). Their lack of understanding what academic rigor looks like perpetuates the low-grade expectations of some parents. Researchers found a critical difference between parents of lower achieving students and higher achieving Mexican American students in their grade expectations: Parents of low achieving Mexican Americans accepted C's and D's as long as the children stated that they were doing their best, whereas these grades were not acceptable to the high achievers' parents.

From their research about Hispanic students who graduate from high school, Romo and Falbo (1996) cited seven strategies parents used to keep their children in school long enough to graduate. The strategies used by successful student's parents were:

1. Parent is in charge and never abandons his or her authority.
2. Two-way Influence: Parents share their power and assert their authority in ways that are respectful. By modeling effective ways of influencing the teachers through positive interactions on behalf of their children, they teach their children how to influence others using positive social interactions.
3. Parents set limits and stick to them.
4. Parents monitor students: They pay attention to their children and know how to tell when something is bothering them.
5. Draw the line with peers: They know who their children's friends are and take action when certain friends are negative influences. They take the time to know the parents of their children's friends. They clearly communicate the types of people and social activities they think are good for them.
6. Continuous message of "Stay in School" is reinforced by all family members. All work as a team to encourage the child.
7. Involved in school: They check report cards, talk to school personnel, advocate for their child, and have ways to communicate with the school without having to depend on the child. (pp. 203-205)

Beliefs and Behaviors of Adults In and Out of School: School Personnel

The attitudes of teachers often shape how students will fare in schools.

Socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity and gender are among the demographic factors attributed to shaping teacher attitudes (Texas Education Agency, 1996). Factors such as school goals, high expectations, structured discipline, and teacher/student interactions are among those cited as affecting academic success in schools. There are some schools that appear to be part of a movement to change the direction and emphasis of schools to be successful in decreasing the school dropout rate and retaining the Mexican American students in school (Lockwood & Secada, 1999). Alatorre Alva & Padilla (1995) stated:

The interactive exchange between Mexican American students and the values and practices of schools and classrooms form the structure in which Mexican American children develop behaviors, beliefs and aspirations in relation to their education.

The role of the school in the drop out or retention of students is not often accepted by all school educators. It is not easy to reflect on practices that may contribute to diminishing the value of a student from a different culture because he/she does not meet the picture of a typical student. Teachers and administrators have formed specific pictures about the perfect student, which, in turn, form the expectations for all children. These pictures or frames of reference will dictate the curriculum that they present, who they call on to answer questions, how they handle absences and tardies, how they view parents' actions or inactions, and how they will see the student in that particular school or classroom (Guerra, 1970; Nieto, 1996; TEA, 1996; Valenzuela, 1999).

Successful schools not only change their curriculum to be more meaningful, relevant and rigorous, but they move toward becoming a caring community of learners.

This means that both students and the adults become involved as learners. This is a departure from an education system that is top down and focused on courses rather than students. The teachers and administrators in these schools have an understanding of how the school environment contributes to a student's success or failure. Staff in successful schools put into practice strategies that complement the culture of the student and those which are expected in the larger community such as collaboration with one another, remaining open to new ideas and understandings, allowing flexibility without sacrificing high educational goals, and retaining high expectations for all their students (Rumsberger, 1991; Trueba, 1991). Teachers meet to discuss specific students' needs and show genuine interest in students as individuals. Teachers collaborate with each other, administrators, parents, and students in order to build learning environments that foster student success. In successful schools, support systems are in place for students who are having difficulties finding success, such as counseling, tutoring, mentorships, and career options (Lockwood, 1996; Lockwood & Secada, 1999; Nieto, 1996; Romo, 1998; Romo & Falbo, 1996; Seda & Bixler-Marquez, 1994; Valenzuela, 1999).

Successful Schools or Programs

There are numerous success stories, model programs, and practices that have significantly improved attainment for Hispanic Americans. Effective teachers use their knowledge of the cultural, psychological, and academics characteristics as a foundation to build success for their students (Lockwood & Secada, 1999; Trueba, 1991).

Researchers cite successful practices, but they caution that there is no single program or

formula that will fit every school. Out of the long list of programs and practices that schools are implementing, there are some that have been proven effective for Mexican American students. During the research by the Hispanic Dropout Project committee, Lockwood and Secada (1999) identified some high schools that were being successful in reducing the dropout rates of their Hispanic youth. They discussed two high schools in particular that were successful with Hispanic students: Mar Vista High School and Calexico High School.

Mar Vista High School implemented Project AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination). This project focuses on teachers working as teams, constant evaluation of each student's progress, and consideration of any social or personal problems that may be impeding their success. The goal of the project is to identify Hispanic students who are candidates to enroll in college (Lockwood, 1996). Calexico High School is one model school that researchers (Lockwood, 1996; Lockwood & Secada, 1999) cite as having some practices in place that show the great promise in retaining Mexican American students. The Calexico model was one identified by the Hispanic Dropout Project as having a successful, replicable program for reducing the dropout rates. One of the reasons for selecting this school was not only their low annual dropout rate of approximately 2.4 percent, which is lower than the state's average, but also their relatively high percentage of students who enter a two- or four-year college. The key to the success of Calexico High School is the attitude of the staff in moving beyond the ideological construct of what "school should be" (Chavez, R., 1997; Lockwood, 1996). The school has moved beyond the traditional ways of "being" and

built a program based on the needs of their students and delivered it through creative, culturally respectful curricula and pedagogy (Lockwood, 1996). The school offers to its eleventh and twelfth graders four different academically heterogeneous professional career paths, with fifteen majors. Their objective is to promote attention to the future. Students have the opportunity of selecting the career path institutes on their own.

Since Callexico's staff believes that students must be in a safe and non-threatening environment, they have created an Alternative High School for students who cannot continue at Callexico. At Aurora, students are required to have an individual action plan for future education, the military, or workforce goals. The staff has also made provisions for students who are newly arrived immigrants. These students participate in the El Cid program that successfully mixes English speakers with non-English speakers. This allows for students to learn two languages and form supportive partnerships.

Callexico High School does not work in a vacuum with little support from their school district. Lockwood (1996) reported that the Callexico school district has set procedures and practices in place that will boost school completion.

In the research of successful schools in Texas with Hispanic students, Reyes, Scribner, and Scribner (1999) cite studies of several elementary schools, two middle schools, and two high schools. These schools are located along the Texas-Mexico border region and the Hispanic population is predominantly Mexican American. The schools are also predominantly low socioeconomic, bilingual, limited English proficient, and structured for English as a Second Language students. The characteristics of these

schools were very much like those identified in the Callexico study. The approach was different, but administrators, teachers, and parents worked together with the main focus being the success of the students. Some of the successful practices in place cited were: (a) a strong curriculum that ensures bi-literacy in both English and Spanish, (b) the use of inclusive practices such as cooperative learning, heterogeneous grouping, and personalization of the academic experience, (c) outreach to parents to communicate district instructional goals and provide strategies to insure their children complete school and move on to post-secondary training, (d) assessment of current practices in the schools and provision of staff development, and assessment of learning through portfolios, exhibitions, and demonstrations presented and explained by students, (e) encouragement of student/adult bonds through a variety of support strategies, (f) collaboration between teachers to discuss current practices, curriculum and student needs, as well as to encourage team teaching (Lockwood, 1996).

In the border schools studied, Reyes et al. (1999) concluded that the successful learning communities simply ignored the barriers to learning. They had a shared vision of success for all students that was truly embraced by all. The researchers stated that one important characteristic of successful schools was a school staff that was focused and emphasized “everything positive related to the learner, the learning conditions and characteristics of their students and the home environment.” The teachers collaborated for instructional purposes, made instruction culturally relevant and tied it to the lives of students. The students were not only actively engaged in the activities but were allowed to participate in the instructional process. The use of cooperative learning and peer

tutoring is one of the strategies utilized by teachers.

Valuing a relationship between the home and school by both school staff and parents is a second important characteristic identified in the successful schools. In some of the schools, there were structured accommodations to help build collaborative relationships with parents through adult education classes, volunteering opportunities, fund raising activities, and creating a school with a welcoming environment for parents. The parents described a welcoming school as one where the staff smiled and greeted them when they saw them in the school. The simple gesture of friendly acknowledgment made them feel welcome and valued.

Some of the schools worked with parents through the creation of parenting centers and through the use of parent specialists. The role of the parent specialist was to provide the link between school and home as well as advocate for parents. There was a difference in the involvement of parents between the elementary schools and the secondary schools so the role of the parent specialists became very important. As a non-teaching staff member it was their responsibility to help create an open environment for parents. They became very important in helping parents who did not feel comfortable in the schools, learn to negotiate the school system and become involved in their children's schools. They helped them communicate with teachers and to network with other parents in the community (Reyes et al., 1999; Rumsberger, 1991).

In these high-performing borderland schools the following were cited as "best practices" in building collaborative relationships among school staff and Hispanic parents at both the elementary and secondary levels. These high performing schools:

1. build on cultural values of Hispanic parents;
2. stress personal contact with parents;
3. foster communication with parents;
4. create a warm environment for parents; and
5. facilitate structural accommodations for parent involvement. (p. 52)

Summary

The review of the literature shows that although low socioeconomic Mexican American students face many challenges in and out of school, those that are successful in school have learned how to negotiate the school system and have support systems such as friends, parents, teachers, or other adults that encourage and help them. All educators must understand the resiliency demonstrated by successful students today. If the Hispanic population continues to be the largest minority in our schools, we must provide the school settings needed to help them succeed. We must be ready to work with their parents and help them understand how to work with us. It is a partnership and not a struggle for power. If we continue the disconnection between the home and school, or the lack of respect or understanding of the student's, culture we will continue to disengage students. By empowering our students to learn how to voice their needs and frustrations, and by building relationship with them, we might be able to increase the success stories of second, third, and fourth generation low socioeconomic Mexican American students who have the highest drop rates today.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the purpose and focus of this study. It further presents the research questions that developed from the purpose, together with the procedures used in the study and the methods of data collection and analysis.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to find out what strategies hold the greatest promise for reducing the dropout rate of Hispanic American students in the Austin Independent School District. Research was lacking in the area of Mexican American student success; and it was especially sparse when identifying factors that would explain why some Mexican American students did quite well in school and others with the same sociocultural background fail. How did some of the students negotiate the socioeconomic and cultural differences within an educational context that is monolingualistic and monocultural? The school staff and district personnel can assess and replicate for other students the information learned about the overall experience of former low socioeconomic Hispanic American students who attended Austin I.S.D. schools and graduated from high school. The information will focus on why they stayed in school, the situations or factors that caused them greatest concern, and the factors that contributed to retaining the students in school.

Research Questions

The following questions guided the study:

- What factors keep low socioeconomic Mexican American students in the Austin I. S. D. from dropping out of school?
- What support systems do low socioeconomic Mexican American high school graduates identify as important?
- What challenges do low socioeconomic Mexican American students encounter?

Participants

For the purpose of this study, I focused on former high school graduates from three different high schools in the Austin Independent School District. The high schools selected were located in three different parts of the city: North, South, and Southwest Austin. Each of the three high schools had approximately 200 to 300 Spring graduates in 1998 and 1999. The Superintendent's designee in the Austin I.S.D provided the lists of graduates for those years. While the number of graduates was large, I focused on the former students who not only were second generation or above of Mexican American descent, but also were from low socioeconomic families. The number of students recommended varied from ten at one campus to thirty at another campus.

Letters went out to former students, who graduated in the Spring of 1998 or 1999, informing them about the study and asking if they could be contacted to further the purpose of the study and their possible participation in the study. Several letters

came back undelivered due to the participants moving. Others receiving letters did not respond. Of the participants that responded to the letter, two declined to participate. I telephoned the graduates that responded indicating that they were interested in learning more about the research. The participants again received an explanation about the study and the purpose for conducting such a study. If they stated they were interested in participating I presented the following four questions:

- Did you graduate in 1998, or 1999, from (Name) High School?
- Did you attend Austin Independent School District schools during your entire school life?
- Did you participate in the Free/Reduced School Lunch program? Or did you attend Pre-Kindergarten in the A.I.S.D.?
- Are you of Mexican American descent? If so, what generation are you?

Based on the responses given, I selected one participant from each school that met the criteria for the case study. Each participant selected was a third or fourth generation Mexican American, and all three attended the Austin Independent School District throughout their school years. The selected participants had been on the free or reduced lunch program while attending school. Only one of the participants attended pre kindergarten. The case studies ultimately included two males and one female. The males both graduated from high school in Spring, 1999; and the female graduated from high school in Spring 1998.

Procedures

With permission from the superintendent's designee, a roster of the students who graduated at the end of the 1997-98 and 1998-99 school years from the three high schools served as the beginning list. I communicated with the three principals of the high schools selected and enlisted their assistance in identifying school personnel to assist me in identifying students they believed were Mexican American, but not recent immigrants, and who they thought had participated in the free and reduced school lunch program. Each principal designated a person they felt knew the former students well enough to identify them. The two criteria given to the principals and their designees were: 1) select the former students they felt had been successful students, and 2) select former students they believed were second or third generation, or above, Mexican American students.

Once the narrowed list of students was in hand, I obtained each former student's home address, or telephone number. That information was on their permanent record folder stored at the school, or was part of the data collected for high school reunion contact. Confidentiality requirements of the federal program guidelines prevented me from obtaining the students' lunch program status. However, I asked the potential participants about their Free/Reduced Lunch Program status during the first telephone contact.

The selection of the students was different at each high school. At one high school, the principal participated directly and along with one of the staff members that he felt knew the students well. Another high school e-mailed the names and telephone

numbers of the students he and his staff felt were good candidates for participation. The candidates from that particular high school were the easiest to contact. The selection process took longer at one high school since the principal of the school left and the new principal had to be contacted. It took several e-mails and phone calls to contact the principal and explain the purpose of the study. Since the district requires that principals approve any studies related to their campuses, each received a copy of the proposal.

The interviews with each participant were at different locations. The participant selected the location where they felt most comfortable. The two males selected restaurants for the meetings. The female selected her parent's home, where she was living with her two children. The interviewer tape recorded each interview, and prepared a transcript after each interview. Tape recording allowed me to have the exact words of the participant. The transcript allowed me to review responses and determine areas needing clarification or to ask for more information. I also contacted the participants by telephone when they were unable to meet.

In order to triangulate the data, participants were asked to name key informants during their interviews. Each participant named a family member as a key informant. In addition, each also named a school person, one named a school administrator, and two named teachers. I visited the three high schools received to gain tacit knowledge about the current school environment and an understanding of the participants description of the school. At each school I was able to speak with an administrator, or other staff member, who had been at the campus between 1994 through 1999 to learn about the programs and supports systems available during those years. I wanted to understand

their interpretation of the culture of the school at that time. Conversations with administrators focused on communication between the home and school, or communication with the student body.

Data Collection

Two-hour interviews occurred with each participant at a location of their choosing. In all cases, tape recording occurred with the permission of the subjects. The questions guiding the interviews were:

- What are you doing today?
- Tell me about your school experience in general.
- What were you like in school?
- How do you think you did academically?
- Did you have a job during school? If yes: Tell me about it.
- What was it like for you in High School? Middle School? Elementary?
- What programs, or activities, did you participate in during high school?
- Can you tell me about any events you would call “significant” in your school life?
- Tell me about your teachers. What were they like, or what do you remember about them?
- Who else do you remember in school?
- Why do you think you stayed in school? What kept you going?
- Was there ever a time when you thought of dropping out?

- Can you remember a time when one of your friends wanted to dropout, or did dropout?
- Why do you think your friend(s) dropped out of school?
- Do you think anybody could have done anything to keep them from dropping out?
- What are your future plans?

In naturalistic inquiry, researchers delve into the responses of the person interviewed as much as necessary in order to construct meaning in the context of the study. The questions listed served as a guide to delve into the school experience of the participant, but as the interviews evolved, in order to understand the participants experience, additional unstructured questions followed.

According to Erlandson et al., 1993, trustworthiness is established through credibility, applicability through transferability, consistency through dependability, and neutrality through confirmability. I employed the methods of triangulation, peer debriefings, member checks, persistent observation and reflective journals to establish credibility. Several visits were made to the schools attended by the participants. As a school district employee, I also had the opportunity to visit other high schools. I held conversations with the principals and other school personnel about their schools informally. I kept a reflexive journal to write my thoughts, emotions, feelings, and questions, and also to write detailed observations of places, people, and things.

In order to triangulate the information gained from the interviews with the participants, I asked each participant to identify key informants. Those key informants

that agreed to participate also participated in interviews. Key informants were contacted. After telephone contact and with permission of the participant, all but one of the key informants agreed to participate. Tape recordings, with permission, were done to allow for accurate gathering of information.

Data Analysis

In naturalistic inquiry, there is an assumption that there are multiple constructions of realities, rather than a single reality, to an experience. With that in mind and with an eye toward understanding the participants' construction of realities of their school experience, I tape recorded the interviews, transcribed and coded each one. After transcribing each interview and reviewing notes from my reflexive journal, I reflected on the information gathered and the interview process. The focus was on trying to interpret what the participant had shared.

- Was the participant providing a clear picture of his or her experience?
- What follow up questions did I need to ask?
- Did I need to restructure some of the questions?
- Did I need to ask additional questions?
- Were there any gaps in the information I had gathered so far?
- What questions did I need to ask key informants?

Each interview also provided me with information about the structure of the questions asked and whether the questions needed rephrasing, or even elimination, so that I could get an understanding of the subjects' school experience. A review and

unitization of the information transcribed on 3 x 5 cards from each participant's interview, helped in perceiving possible emerging categories. Several categories emerged from the unitized data after I categorized and re-categorized the cards. Member checks were conducted, and peer debriefings were utilized throughout the process of categorizing and studying the data to see if different themes emerged.

Chapter IV contains the data analysis of each case study. Each case study contains descriptions of the participants, their family, and their relationship with family members, their school experiences, peer relationships, their views on dropping out of school, and their aspirations. The case studies may contain different subtitles depending on the information provided by the participant and the categories that emerged. At the end of each case study, I included a reflection.

Chapter V reports the findings of the study.

Chapter VI is the concluding chapter. A summary of findings, conclusions, and recommendations for further study are included. The recommendations are based on the literature review and from the case studies.

CHAPTER IV

CASE STUDIES

This chapter contains the three participant stories. The participants were three third generation Mexican Americans, a female and two males, who are Austin ISD high school graduates. Selected from among sixty-five students nominated by three different high schools in the Austin Independent School District, they provide us, through their stories, with individual perspectives on their own school experiences. The readers can draw insights into how the selectees were able to stay in school and graduate from high school despite their low socioeconomic status and their ethnicity. The order of presentation of their stories here is not significant.

Monica Delgado

Introduction

The first time I called Monica Delgado's house, I spoke with her mother. She stated that Monica was not home from work. I identified myself and told her the purpose of my call. Monica's mother was very happy and excited that her daughter's principal had identified her as a successful student. She stated that she would give her the message and make sure she returned my call. However, even after talking with Monica, it took three broken appointments and numerous telephone calls to get to meet with her. The first time we were to meet at McDonald's for lunch since she was on vacation. However, she failed to show up or call to cancel the meeting. After I called her two more times, she decided it would be best that we meet at her parents' house in

the evening when she got off work.

We met at her parents' house right after they had supper. Monica's mother was washing dishes by hand when I arrived and her father was watching television in the living room. Two small boys were running by and calling out to their grandmother. Monica's father took the boys to one of the bedrooms to watch television while we met at the dining table in the kitchen.

Monica is a 25-year-old mother of two boys, ages three and five. She is medium framed, has large dark brown eyes and olive skin, and smiles easily. She is a third generation Mexican American and speaks fluent English and only a little Spanish. Monica attended school in the Austin ISD since prekindergarten and graduated from Addison High School in the Austin ISD in the spring of 1998.

Monica's Story

Monica married her high school boyfriend in 2000. When they first married, Monica and her husband lived with her parents. "My husband had a really good job, but it was too hard for both of us, so my mom said we could stay with them until we got on our feet. We lived with them for about eight months and then got our own place." Monica explained that living on their own was a very difficult situation. She was pregnant and several complications attended her pregnancy. She was trying to help out economically by holding several jobs, but quit due to the complications. This was very stressful for both of them, since they were trying to keep afloat economically. After job-hopping for a few months, she finally got a job with a bank for two and a half years.

At the time we met, Monica and her husband had recently separated after almost five years of marriage. She had moved back in with her parents and older brother.

When we spoke again a year later, I learned Monica had filed for divorce, and it had just become final. She was living alone in an apartment with her two children in Austin.

Currently, Monica is working as a data clerk at a diagnostic medical office. She is responsible for performing tasks that require computer skills, filing, and working with medical technicians and with the public. One of the things she likes about her present job is that she gets to learn about the responsibilities of being a radiologist. When one of the medical technicians needs help, they ask her to help out. At times, they allow her to observe their work, as they explain what they are doing. This has aroused her interest in going back to college and majoring in radiology. The staff in her office has taken an interest in her and is encouraging her to go back to school and get a degree in the medical field. I found her to be a bubbly, friendly person. This may contribute to her projecting a positive image of herself, making it easy for others to relate to her and to encourage her to pursue a degree.

During our visit at her parents' house, it was easy to see that Monica has a caring relationship with her sons. As we talked, the boys came in and out of the kitchen where we sat, showing her pictures they drew or structures they were making. She smiled at them and spoke in a soft, patient voice. She asked one of the boys to tell me what he does at daycare. As the four-year-old boy answered, Monica smiled and gave him a hug. When he was through talking, she asked him to return to the bedroom with his grandmother and draw her a picture.

Family

Monica comes from an intact family. She is the youngest of three children and is the only girl. Her brothers also graduated from Addison High School. According to Monica's parents, all three of the children were involved in sports. Mr. Delgado encouraged them by being a little league coach and an umpire. Mrs. Delgado stated:

It was hard at times in high school with all the kids involved in sports. We had to divide our time between them. Jose would go to the boys' games and I would go to Monica's. *Los dos andavamos para arriba y para abajo con estos muchachos. Y luego Jose tambien era umpire asi es que muchas veces yo tenia que ir.*

Since they tried to attend all the sports events, Mrs. Delgado found they were spreading themselves thin. It was especially difficult because since Mr. Delgado umpired after work, she felt she was bearing all the burdens. One son was a top football player and a baseball player. He was popular and outgoing. The other son was involved in soccer. He was quieter and had a severe dyslexia problem. This caused him to graduate a year later than his class. Monica was involved in softball and volleyball.

Both of Monica's parents worked while she was growing up, so she and her brothers attended day care. During her elementary school years, her mother stated that they were not actively involved at school in ways such as volunteering, or actively involved in school organizations such as the Parent Teacher Association. Their involvement occurred during high school according to her parents. Mrs. Delgado remarked, "We were booster club supporters, and they were involved in school activities like the Future Farmers of America, sports, cheerleading, and stuff like that. We tried to be there as much as we could, just to see them." The lack of her parents' involvement in elementary and middle school does not appear to have any negative impact on Monica's views about how they supported her schooling. According to her mother, they

did attend all parent conferences, sent cookies when asked, and attended any P.T.A. meetings if Monica was involved in the performances. Monica believes that her parents' support came from their willingness to listen to her and her brothers and take action on their behalf when necessary.

We had our differences, but a lot of times if we had something to say, they were really open. They listened to us, and they always backed us up with whatever they could. They've always been there for us. I know I can always count on them.

As an example, she told about a time she had difficulties adjusting to high school the first semester of her freshman year. The district changed the boundaries that year, and the feeder pattern for her address changed from Addison High School to Monroe High School. She was the only one of the three children who had to attend Monroe High School. The school district allowed her brothers to remain at Addison because one was a junior and the other a senior. This was a bit disheartening to Monica, but some of her friends were going to the new high school, so she thought it might be a good move. Monroe High School is located in a high socioeconomic neighborhood, and is not as diverse ethnically as Addison. The majority of the students were white with smaller percentages of Hispanic and African-American students being bused in from different neighborhoods. Monica was very unhappy at the school and let her parents know it.

They knew I wasn't happy there, and they saw my grades were going down. We sat down and discussed it. I told them that I couldn't continue attending that school and that I didn't think I was going to make it. It really upset them, so they went to the school and met with the counselor and principal. My parents wrote on the transfer that they had transportation problems, since my brothers attended Addison. The next semester, I was able to attend Addison. I was very happy at Addison. I felt like I really fit in, and I was more comfortable.

Both of Monica's parents strongly believe in education and in having their

children graduate from high school. They have always aspired to having them continue on to higher education. Monica's mother is a strong advocate for her children, according to Monica. When Monica first enrolled at her new designated high school and began having difficulties academically, her mother got in touch with the counselor immediately. When Monica's grades began dropping, her mother went to school to see what the problem was and what could be done to help her daughter. When Monica began skipping school and sneaking out of the house to be with her boyfriend, her parents immediately went to school to speak with an administrator. The Assistant Principal would call them immediately if she was not at school.

When I was having difficulties and getting a lot of pressure from my boyfriend, I thought about dropping out. I started skipping school and going out when my parents were asleep. My parents called Mr. Cruz and had a long talk. My parents and I had a long talk and they offered to buy me a car if I graduated. "We'll do anything you want us to do just please bring home that diploma. That's all we ask!" I hit the books pretty hard. I still got some Cs and Ds, every now and then some As, but I graduated! They were happy and I was happy. I felt really good about it.

Monica's parents had no qualms about going to the school and meeting with the necessary personnel, or doing whatever it took to help their children be successful.

During Monica's high school years, her parents were involved in the booster clubs. Since all three of the children were in sports, her parents divided their time attending the events. Monica's mother would go to her games, and her father would attend the boys' games.

Both of her parents graduated from high school and spoke both English and Spanish fluently. Monica understands some Spanish but is not a fluent speaker of the

language. They are native Texans and were born in a city neighboring Austin. They are both from large families, and several of their siblings have graduated from college.

Their family background has influenced their views and beliefs in the value of education. Monica's mother was a migrant whose father believed in his children working in the fields instead of going to school. He didn't send his children to school regularly until the law required parents of migrant children to enroll them in school instead of keeping them at home to work. His failure to value education made Monica's mother more determined to finish high school.

Monica's father is also from a large family, but his father emphasized the importance of an education to all his children. He had his own ranch; so after school and during the summer, the children spent time helping out in the field. Monica believes that due to their own struggles getting an education while growing up, her parents communicated to their children that dropping out was not acceptable in their eyes.

Monica feels that her parents' history is what made them so supportive of her and her siblings' efforts at school and so concerned about them getting an education. They were very disappointed when she decided to dropout of college at the end of the first year and come home to marry her boyfriend. She felt they knew how stubborn she was and relented because they knew that she would marry with or without their approval. They still keep encouraging her to go back to college and finish her degree. They are ready to help her with babysitting and in any other way they can. Monica knows that they will do this because they are presently babysitting her brother's two boys while his wife goes to college.

Monica did not talk about being close to her brothers, but they do see each other every weekend at their parents' house. She mentioned that one reason she wanted to attend Addison High School was because her brothers were there. At Addison, she was known as Jacob and Peter's sister. One of the assistant principals that she knew well at Addison had known her middle brother, Jacob, quite well. Jacob almost didn't graduate due to his truancy and drug problems. He was one of the star football and baseball players. Her parents went to the school and met with the Principal and Assistant Principal to get him back on track. "He gave them a lot of problems; and we thought he was not going to graduate. He got into the Delta program and that helped him. I was also in the Delta program one semester." The Delta program is a self-paced computer program that allows students to work on objectives that they have not yet met due to their lack of attendance in the regular program.

Monica believes that the relationship her parents formed with the school administrators due to her brother's problems at the school helped her. Her parents knew who to talk to when she started having problems. She also believes that the assistant principal knew her family well since he had dealt with her brother so he knew that they cared.

School Experience

Addison High School was the school of Monica's choice since many of her friends and her brothers were there. Even though she had started at Monroe High School, she felt that Addison was the place where she felt more comfortable. At both

schools, she involved herself in baseball and volleyball. At Addison, she was also a cheerleader one year. She believes that the hardest part of her school life was the start of high school. She sees it as a time when she realized that these were going to be the last four years of school, and then everybody was going to “split up” after that.

Once I started high school, it was very different. It's very different from middle school. It was hard! It was very hard! A lot of my friends were at the same school with me, but it was still very difficult. Getting to start at a new level, high school, and realizing that these are your last four years of school is scary. Thinking about everybody being together for a short period of time and then splitting up after that was hard for me to think about. As the years went by, high school got easier and easier. You get to know more people, you're grown up, but at first it was really hard.

Monroe High School was a different experience for Monica. She didn't speak directly about feelings of racism or socioeconomic inequities but she did speak about unfairness, feelings of discomfort, and levels of expectation from the teachers. When I asked her to tell me about Monroe, she discussed the fact that it was harder perhaps because she didn't know as many friends, or perhaps because the teachers were harder.

I had a lot of trouble being at Monroe. I told my parents, “This school is extremely hard for me. I don't know if it's the classes, or the teachers, or what.” Monroe teachers were a little stricter than at Addison. I felt a lot of pressure from the teachers at Monroe. They were really hard on the students. I'm not saying that we weren't pressured at Addison, but it felt like we were taught more than at Monroe. Not that we were not taught at Monroe, but I just felt more comfortable just being at Addison than at Monroe. I didn't feel comfortable there at all.

Monica stated that sports life was what kept her motivated in school. At Monroe, she felt that the staff did not treat her fairly. While she was there, she played volleyball, where the coaches placed her on the B team. She described the A team as the players

who got to play all the time. She felt that even though she and some of her friends had tried out for the A team, other girls who were not as good made that team. She and her friends had the skills, but that didn't seem to matter. The reasons for such decisions were unknown to her, and she is still puzzled about it. She only mentioned that at the time, she felt it was quite unfair. Some parents would complain to the coach and point out that other girls on the team were more skilled, but he ignored them. She feels that he was the coach, and he was going to have it his way, and his decision had already been made. Due to what she saw as unfairness, she quit the volleyball team. This action escalated her negative feelings about being at Monroe.

I didn't think anything was fair. I was very frustrated. My parents and I discussed the situation, and I told them that I didn't like the school at all and was ready to quit. That's when my parents took action and decided to go talk to the principal and counselor and ask for a transfer. At first the transfer was denied, but my parents spoke to different people in the district until they got the transfer approved. They were convinced that I needed to move, because they saw how my grades were declining.

The transfer process took a while and her parents had to appeal the first request denial. The district finally granted the transfer based on "hardship." Her brothers attended Addison. Since they drove Monica to Monroe daily, they had to make an extra trip to drop her off. At the end of the first semester, she left Monroe and enrolled at Addison High School.

At Addison, Monica was involved in sports all three years. Her sophomore year she played on the varsity volleyball and varsity softball teams. Her junior year she took a year off from volleyball and became a varsity cheerleader. She was the first member of her extended family to become a cheerleader. Thus, it became one of the proudest

moments for her mother.

“My mom was really excited that I was a cheerleader. She called all my aunts and told them about it. She went to all the games to see me perform. Of course she also attended all the games I played in. I was still in softball so she attended those games.” Monica’s involvement in sports led to her receiving a full paid softball scholarship to a state college.

Monica describes the teaching staff at Addison generally as good teachers that were open and understanding. The teachers told students explicitly what they were going to teach them, the major points of the lesson, and their expectations. They were also ready to help the students that didn’t understand a concept. One important attribute of being a good teacher, in Monica’s view, is the issue of trust. As she spoke about the teachers that she felt were good, three characteristics were important: ability to trust the students, being in control, and being consistent. Monica described the good teachers as those who trusted their students. She described the principal as “really good because she had control over things.” She named her coach and the journalism teacher as two of the people who trusted the students. As she described the relationship between her journalism teacher and the students, the focus was on the relationship built by the teacher with her students that then translated into one of mutual respect and trust. The journalism teacher respected them and trusted them by allowing them to leave campus and sell ads and take pictures. She set limits and expectations as well as the consequences that would occur if the rules weren’t followed. She dealt consistently and fairly with the students who failed to comply with the expectations set.

We'd tell her when we wanted to do something off school grounds, and she'd say, 'okay, I'm trusting you but you need to return 15 minutes before the bell rings; and I want proof in my hand that you did the job.' We'd go out and actually do our job. She really trusted us and we met her expectations.

Monica had so much respect for this teacher that she volunteered extra time in her classroom. She compared the experience to being her junior aide, because she helped finish any tasks that needed to be completed. Monica did this after completing her lessons in the Delta program. Instead of going home and returning for softball practice, she stayed on campus and volunteered to help. She is very proud that she had the ability to work with a teacher in this manner.

There were some teachers that she described as less effective. She shared that these teachers were "the ones that didn't know enough about the subject matter and what they needed for the students to do." Some of the ineffective teachers, according to Monica, would lecture on and on without really teaching anything. She described the ineffective assistant principals, or teachers, as those who did not listen when they were told about problems she and her friends were having with other students. Their response to complaints from the students about other students was usually, "Well, we have to catch them, we have to see it." Monica perceived this lack of action by the adults in the school as non-caring behavior and lack of trust in students. "We were having trouble with the girls who were gang members, and they wouldn't take our word for it. We just quit going to them and sought help elsewhere, or took care of it ourselves."

When I asked Monica if there had been any significant adult, or adults, that she could go to, she immediately spoke about Mr. Cruz, the assistant principal. She met him

the semester she moved to Addison. She described him as an adult in the school who was not there just to do a job, but as a person who cared about the students. “I think he was one of the greatest assistant principals there. You could always go and talk to him. You knew you could trust him.” Mr. Cruz’ actions as recounted by Monica depict a man who cared about the students and developed relationships with them. She spoke very highly of him, and stated that she felt that his positive attitude toward the students led to his having strong relationships with them.

Mr. Cruz liked to help the students and made them feel comfortable around him. He just made everything so easy on us. He was one you could always trust. If we did something, or there was something going on, we knew we could run to him. I always knew he was one person I could trust and talk to about anything.

Monica spoke about the first time she saw Mr. Cruz in the hallway after having met him the previous day. As they passed each other in the hallway, he called her by her name. This was very significant to her because he recognized her as a person and not just another student.

After the first time I met him, I saw him coming down the hallway. He said, “Hi Monica, how are you.” I responded, “Good, how are you Mr. Cruz.” He smiled and said, “Good! Now I don’t want to see you in my office.” I laughed and told him that if he did, it would mean I was in trouble. From then on, I felt that we had a connection. His interaction with me indicated that he remembered me as an individual instead of just one of the names on his roster. It meant that he cared enough to remember the students that he met.

Mr. Cruz was the person her parents contacted when they began having problems with Monica. They met with him and discussed the problems openly, and requested that he inform them if she was absent. “They knew that he would have some influence on me because I always talked about him at home. They had also met him before when my

middle brother was having some problems attending school.” Monica remembers that Mr. Cruz pulled her out of class and counseled her about the mistake she was making. His advice was strong enough to make her take notice of some of the things she was doing. His influence had a positive effect on her and helped as she made her decision about dropping out or staying in school.

I was having a lot of problems with my boyfriend at the time; he was putting me through a rough time. I was giving up and feeling that I couldn't keep up with his demands and the school's. I remember Mr. Cruz told me that I needed to think about things and stop listening to the bad influences that were keeping from making the right decisions. He told me that I could make it through school, and he was going to see that I made it. If he needed to walk me to class or sit in class with me so that I wouldn't leave he would do it. It meant a lot to me that he would go that far to help me. I had a lot of respect for him.

At Addison, the assistant principal's student assignments were alphabetical. Monica and both her brothers were all Mr. Cruz' assignment. Monica stated that a friend had described Mr. Cruz as someone you could talk to at any time. She commented that Mr. Cruz' office was always full of students who just stopped by to visit with him. She felt that he always knew what was going on in the school. When any problems arose, he would put his foot down and take control of the situation. “He was always fair.” These characteristics caused her to increase her trust in him.

Peers

As she began high school, it bothered Monica that not all her friends from Middle School were attending Monroe. Even though she made friends easily and she had friends on the volleyball team, the majority of her close friends had moved onto

Addison High School. Once she moved to Addison, Monica felt more comfortable and had a peer group. Monica's friends were those in sports with her, or the cheerleaders. The student body often saw them as the "popular" group, which may have been a reason why she had some problems with another group of girls. She characterized her circle of friends as not being "preppie" but more mature and better than the girls who were causing them problems. She felt that even though they tried to get along with everybody, another specific group of girls, who were gang members, targeted her.

I remember that the girls had been taunting us, so we went up to them and asked why they didn't like us. They had no response to the question. We told them that enough was enough and the harassment needed to stop. I went to Mr. Cruz and talked to him about it several times. He spoke with the girls but it just continued. I finally ended up fighting with one of them on school grounds and getting suspended for three days. Mr. Cruz was furious with me. He told me that I knew to walk away and go to him. The problem was that I had a temper and I'd had enough. The only good thing that happened was that we didn't fight off school grounds. Who knows what might have happened with no one to stop things. We tried to handle it the best way we could, since we had a lot of people to run to; but I just couldn't take it anymore. When we told the other assistant principals, they just told us that they needed to see it to do anything about it.

Monica had been discussing the harassment issue with Mr. Cruz for several months, and he was trying to stay on top of things. Unfortunately, tempers flared, and he was unable to keep her from fighting. This was very upsetting for her, because she felt that he could not control the gang girls. After the first incident, the girls continued to cause problems for Monica and her friends. Monica explained that they really tried hard to convince those girls to stop and asked them to explain what the problem was, but to no avail. They were already juniors, and Monica felt that they needed to solve their

problems in a more mature manner other than fighting. The problem continued for two months until the two groups engaged in a fight. “Mr. Cruz called me into his office and was furious. He told me I should have trusted him to take care of it. I argued back with the reasons for doing it. I was suspended for three days.” After that incident, the girls no longer harassed them. “We’d see them during the summer and they still hadn’t changed their ways. I know quite a few of them didn’t graduate from high school. They just dropped out.”

She feels that for the most part, she got along with everybody; and her circle of friends grew as the years progressed. Her circle of friends grew to include girls from the different sports teams she belonged to and from some of her classes.

Parents play an important part in regard to knowing with whom their children associate after school. “My parents always allowed us to bring our friends home. I remember seeing my brothers’ friends all the time. They’d eat supper at our house and just ‘hang out.’ We had our friends come for dinner, for sleep-overs, or to study.”

Monica’s best friend was a teammate during her first softball season at Addison. She regarded her as her confidante, and they spent a lot of time together. “She was always with me. After softball games, she would come home with me and have pizza, or we’d go somewhere with one of our families. At times, I’d go over and stay at her house or she’d come stay at my house. We went everywhere together.” The biggest challenge in the relationship with her friend occurred once Monica met her future husband. Monica began sneaking out of the house. She began skipping classes. Monica expected her best friend to cover up for her, but her friend wouldn’t do it. This disappointed Monica but

the friendship didn't end.

She was the one that was my backup for everything. She would bail me out. If either one of us needed something, we could count on each other. When I told her I was thinking of quitting, she said, "You can't do this, your parents are promising you a car. Think of all the things we can do together, and the things we still need to see together." She was really, really hard on me and griping at me the majority of the time. She pleaded with me not to dropout of school and reminded me that I had a softball scholarship to attend college. I can hear her words, "Monica, you'll look back and say, I can't believe I did this. You're going to look back and say I can't believe I was giving my parents all this trouble." We sat there and talked and cried.

Monica's best friend influenced her to stay in school. They both dreamed of getting their degrees and being friends forever. They remained good friends until Monica quit college and was pregnant with her first son. "We really stayed connected for a while, but I haven't heard from her or anything. We had our little differences and ended up going our separate ways."

Dropping Out

Monica believes that a high school diploma holds more credibility than a GED. She had several friends that dropped out.

I know a lot of us sat there and told them to stick with it and just graduate. They didn't have to go to college but at least get their diploma. We had two or three from our group that actually got tired of school and quit. Some of the girls we knew got pregnant, and they didn't make it back. We told them to at least try and get their GED, but some didn't get that either.

Even after encouraging her friends not to dropout, Monica herself almost dropped out during her junior year. At the time, she was dating her now ex-husband and was going through a lot of stress in the relationship. Her grades were declining, she was skipping

school, and she was sneaking out of the house. At one point, she left home for a week and stayed with her boyfriend at his house. Her mother immediately started looking for her and when she found her, she convinced Monica to come home. The influence her ex-husband had was always strong. Her mother advised her to leave him and concentrate on her studies and on preparing for college. Monica talked about this time in her high school life as a period when she wanted to go out all the time and not listen to family members. She wanted to have fun and party. What finally awakened her were not the pleadings of her parents, or her friends, but her near-failing grades. “When I received my grades, I immediately thought I’m not going to graduate! Then again, Mr. Cruz was there to help me.”

Mr. Cruz met with her and gave the encouragement she needed. She remembers what he said to her, “I will sit in class with you if I have to, and walk you to class if I have to because you have it in you to do well. You can’t waste your life.” She enrolled in the Delta program and a journalism class and did well. Monica believes that the relationship with her parents, the influence of her best friend, and the support of Mr. Cruz helped her make the decision to stay in school. I asked what would have happened if Mr. Cruz hadn’t been there. She stated, “I’m hoping somebody else would have been out there. It was really bad, really out of control for me. I really didn’t think I was going to graduate, but I ended up graduating with more credits than I thought I had.”

Monica’s Parents

Mr. and Mrs. Delgado, Monica’s parents, both graduated from high school. For

Mrs. Delgado, school was very important because she looked at it as a way out of poverty. She comes from a very large family of sixteen children, eight girls and eight boys. They were migrant workers, so she and her siblings didn't have the opportunity to participate in school activities. They would leave school before the end of the year and arrive after school started. "We were very poor, so my father started working in the fields. He liked the money so much that he forgot about our education." All but one of her siblings either graduated from high school or earned their GED. Some of them went on to the junior college, or a university. The one sibling that did not attend school suffered from seizures, so her parents chose not to send her.

Mr. Delgado graduated from high school, as did his eight brothers and sisters. He stated that they were extremely poor growing up but they didn't migrate. They spent their childhood on a ranch and had to work there, beginning in elementary school. His father was very supportive and expected all of them to finish high school. "We struggled like every Hispanic family back then in the 50s and 60s, so we all had to help out." During the summer time, they worked at the ranch or at department stores to make extra money. All eight graduated from high school and several went to college. "Now we have postmasters, school teachers, and business owners in the family."

Monica identified her parents as the people she felt had the biggest impact on her staying in school. When I first called her mother and told her why I wanted to meet with them, she was surprised that Monica had mentioned them. When I met with them in person, Mrs. Delgado commented that she was still surprised that Monica had stated they were important to her finishing high school. Both parents agreed that there were times

when they “kind of struggled with her.” They began to see changes in Monica during her junior and senior year. They believed that by setting limits and consistently upholding them, they were able to deal with challenging times.

Mr. and Mrs. Delgado had to exert energy upholding those beliefs during Monica’s high school years. Monica had a curfew for getting home. She rebelled and tried to break it several times. They depicted it as a challenging time since it is when Monica met her ex-husband. Monica challenged their authority, trying to exert more independence beginning in her junior year. Mrs. Delgado recalled:

Her junior year, she started liking going out and wanting to party. We didn’t let her go out all the time and she’d get very angry. She’d say, “The other parents let the girls stay out.” I said, “I’m sorry sweetie, I’m not like those parents. You have a curfew and that’s the way it is.” That’s when she started sneaking out of the house.

Mr. and Mrs. Delgado stated that they had gone through some challenging times because they were strict and wanted to know what their children were doing, and who their friends were at all times. At one time, they called the police because they couldn’t find Monica. Her mother recalls, “I knew we were going to have trouble down the line if she didn’t stop hanging around with a certain group of girls and with her best friend Mary.” On different occasions, her mother would find out that she wasn’t where she was supposed to be, and she’d call all her friends until she found her; or she would drive around and knock on people’s doors. If there was a party, Mrs. Delgado would drive by to see if Monica and her friends were there.

Perhaps Mrs. Delgado worried that Monica would lose interest in school the way she herself had during her high school years. She remembers going from being an A and

B student to one that almost didn't graduate. The reason for her decline was her discovery that there was a social life in school. She began sneaking out to football games to meet boyfriends, and going to school dances, but always making sure that her father was not aware of it. "My father was very old-fashioned and extremely strict. My brother had gotten in trouble with the law so now we all suffered." Since her father was so strict, the girls would convince their aunt to say she was taking them. "We were always watching our backs because my father would be driving around."

Her parents described Monica as a strong-willed but loving, respectful child. She continues to visit every weekend and often calls to ask for their advice. As they spoke about her, there was pride in her mother's voice, and a smile on both parents' faces. They discussed her accomplishments at school, her new role as a caring, loving mother, and the strength she has shown since getting divorced.

Monica kept very busy when she was in school. In addition to sports and FFA, she was on the newspaper staff and yearbook staff, and of course she was a cheerleader. She was the first one of our whole family that got into cheerleading. She received an award from State Farm Insurance during her junior year and was named as an outstanding Hispanic student at the annual AISD Annual Hispanic Heritage program. She kept us really busy.

Monica's parents worked as a team when their children were in what they describe as crisis situations. They worked together to bring her back home when she ran away and was staying at her boyfriend's house; and they both convinced her to go to college.

Monica's mother discussed one of the most difficult times, when Monica left home without telling them and was living with her boyfriend and his mother. Although

she was attending school regularly, she was not coming home. Mrs. Delgado explains this as one of the hardest things to deal with as parents. “I couldn’t imagine that my daughter was doing this.” Even though she spent hours worrying and crying, she did not give up. In desperation she called the boy’s mother and threatened to press charges if Monica did not return her call. She convinced Monica to return home but Monica dictated the time line. This kind of action on behalf of Monica’s parents communicates to the child the importance of education.

Monica’s parents also saw their role as advocates for their children. When their oldest son began having difficulties in kindergarten, they immediately went to conferences and spoke with the teachers. Their oldest son had been retained in kindergarten and then in third grade again. The school staff told them that he was a slow learner. Mrs. Delgado refused their diagnosis. She fought the label and sought outside help.

I said, “I don’t think so!” He said, “The teachers know, the teachers know.” I said, “No, there’s something else wrong, I just feel it.” I knew that he wasn’t a slow learner. I knew that he was having trouble reading and that the kids were teasing him at school but I knew it wasn’t because he was a slow learner. We took him to a doctor that specializes in children. He said he was just a slow learner. I said, “Nah, Nah, Nah! Don’t give me that! Ya’ll find out what’s really wrong with my child.” I can’t believe these doctors get \$172 an hour and they don’t get the diagnosis right.

They explored different options and found a program at the University of Texas that worked with students with reading difficulties. A university professor tested him and he diagnosed him with severe dyslexia and dysgraphia. It is concerning to think about the number of children in classrooms who may be labeled slow learners when there

might be other problems that need attention. If Mr. and Mrs. Delgado had accepted the school's diagnosis, perhaps their son would not have received the help he needed. Their son eventually received help from the special education program until he graduated from high school.

While in first grade, Monica's teachers informed them that she was having some difficulties academically. They immediately took her to the professor they had worked with previously, and had her tested. Monica's diagnosis was "mildly dyslexic." Her parents followed up by contacting the school, meeting with the teachers and obtaining the necessary help. Monica never mentioned that she had dyslexia, or that anything interfered with her school experience or her ability to do well academically. Monica felt that her parents' strong and continuous support was one of the keys to her success.

Dropping out of school was not acceptable to either Mr. or Mrs. Delgado. Since it was not an option, they were willing to do whatever it took to make sure that their children were successful. When asked why they thought students dropped out of school, they said that they felt there were numerous reasons. They explained that there were probably four main reasons students dropout: a) uninvolved parents; b) parents going through divorce; c) the TAKS test; d) the need to work to help out at home.

Although they discussed parents' various shortcomings, such as lack of involvement, lack of caring, or giving their children too much freedom, they didn't believe that parents were to blame for everything. They felt that the schools and the parents' employers were also to blame, because they didn't always help out, and sometimes added to the problem. Mrs. Delgado remarked:

I hate it when people say it's all the parents' fault. We're working trying to make a living for our families while assuming that our children are at school. When our children aren't at school, the schools don't always inform parents. When our middle son was skipping school, we found out from a friend whose son was skipping with him. The school never called us. We called the assistant principal every day to check if he was in school. We did the same with Monica. We were lucky because we had jobs where we were allowed to leave to go talk with the school about problems or to check on our kids. We didn't have to worry about being fired like some folks. The school helped us with our middle son once we got him back to school. They said, "let's get this boy graduated!" They put him in a program, gave him a packet of work, and gave him a time line to finish and take the test. He graduated with his class.

The willingness not to throw up their hands in despair and give up was the support that Monica needed from her parents. Even though Mr. Delgado characterized himself as a bit more lenient with the children when a crisis arose, he pulled the reins in and worked in partnership with his wife to solve the problem. He was willing to take time off work and visit school daily to check on Monica and her brother. "We pushed and we pulled, but we got them to graduate."

Romo and Falbo (1996b) cited seven strategies successful parents used and Monica's parents exemplified those strategies. It was not through sheer luck that their children graduated from school. Her parents were in charge, set limits, monitored their children, drew the line with peers, had two-way influence, were involved in school, and reinforced staying in school.

The Delgados continue to reinforce their belief in education. Mrs. Delgado encouraged her daughter-in-law to get her GED and enroll at a local university. Today, her daughter-in-law is enrolled in a fast paced academic program at a local university and will graduate next fall. Mr. and Mrs. Delgado support her and their son by

babysitting when she's in school and he's at work. Their son will be attending college as soon as his wife completes her program. Their belief in education has also passed on to Monica. Her goal is to go back and finish her degree. Her parents are willing to help her in any way they can. She inquired about the AISD prekindergarten program and is enrolling her oldest son in prekindergarten next year.

Assistant Principal

Monica believed she had a strong, close relationship with her assistant principal, Mr. Cruz. When I finally found Mr. Cruz, he was working with another school district. He agreed to speak to me about Monica and was impressed that she had mentioned him as a person she felt had a positive impact on her during high school.

Mr. Cruz is a tall, attractive Hispanic male in his late forties, or early fifties, with a full head of hair that is slightly salt and pepper. He was wearing a dark school shirt and Dockers. His office is welcoming, with the walls decorated with school pictures and a picture of his former high school. As soon as I walked in, he gave me a big smile, stretched out his hand, and in a strong, Texan accent, greeted me. He'd been in a meeting all morning and was afraid he'd be late for our meeting. They were discussing how to bring in relevance, rigor, and relationship into their curriculum. He animatedly spoke about the work they are doing and how he believed that one of the most important parts of the three Rs is relationship. "We can make the curriculum harder, and the work more meaningful, but if you don't have the relationship piece ingrained in there you might as well throw it away. You have to connect with the kids." This is exactly what I

expected to hear from the man Monica described and believed was her support.

Mr. Cruz remembered Monica's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Delgado and her middle brother, but explained that he barely remembered Monica. He did remember that Monica was a very involved student who participated in sports, cheerleading, and the yearbook. He expressed admiration for her, because she had not complained when she the coach placed back on the junior varsity volleyball team instead of the varsity team when she returned to the team her senior year. She had left the varsity team to be a cheerleader. "It took a kind of courage to go back after having been on varsity and starting over again, especially her senior year. Most other students wouldn't have done that." He remembered that she played sports because he attended the school's volleyball and softball games. Mr. Cruz believes that attending all extra curricular activities is important because "it shows the kids you care." His philosophy is that you build relationships by showing students you care. The ways to do that, he explained, are by attending extracurricular events, talking to them in the hallways, having an open door policy, and being willing to listen.

We have to earn the kids' trust and their respect and not just expect them to give it to us. When we were raised, our parents told us, "you will respect all adults" and we did it. Kids are different now, and you have to prove yourself. I worked hard at Addison to have a strong relationship with the students.

Mr. Cruz saw Mr. Delgado as very involved in high school. He would see him at school events, booster club meetings, or in the hallways going to check up on his kids. He didn't recall talking to Monica about problems with other students, or dropping out, but he did remember that she could be stubborn. The time he did meet with Monica's

parents was when her middle brother was skipping school. The parents' response to this crisis impressed him and he labels it as a "strong parent base." He believed that a strong parent base, being involved in sports, and her positive outlook about school contributed to Monica's success. In his opinion, students involved in athletics, or other activities in school usually make it.

Reflections

Monica had a strong support system as she went into high school. Her parents communicated that they valued education, by setting rules, listening to her, advocating for her when necessary, and attending all her activities. They knew who her friends were, because they allowed their children to bring friends home with them, and then formed relationships with their children's friends. Monica's parents never gave up on any of their children. When she left home with her boyfriend, her mother searched until she found her. Her parents communicated their expectations clearly and were willing to provide incentives for her to finish high school. They met with the administrators and made themselves available to insure that their children were in attendance. They saw school personnel as partners rather than adversaries. Their involvement was a signal to school personnel that education was valued.

Monica's participation in extracurricular activities provided her with peers who had the same values about school. She often spoke about her friends' influence and how they tried to help each other. The biggest obstacle she encountered was the negative influence from her boyfriend. He was not involved in school activities and leaned more

toward dropping out. In spite of that, she listened to her parents and best friend and attended one year of college. While she was in college, her boyfriend was still attending high school. She continued to see him and constantly encouraged him not to dropout of high school.

Unfortunately, his influence was stronger than her parents, and she quit college. This is one regret that she has, since the marriage did not last, and she has two children to support. Even though she talks about getting a college degree, she has not enrolled in any courses at the local community college, or taken advantage of the program offered by her employer. Her parents are willing to help her in different ways, but she does not have the financial means to pay for daycare, school, and apartment. Raising and caring for her children seem to be the most important things for her right now.

Joseph Paredes

Introduction

I sent several letters to former Franklin High School students and received a response through the mail from Joseph Paredes stating that he was interested in learning about the study and perhaps participating. He wrote the date and time that I could contact him. The evening I telephoned Joseph, he answered promptly. I told him about the study and the purpose for doing it. I sensed excitement in his voice as he asked who had given me his name as a successful high school student. I explained that it had been the school principal and some of his staff members. He stated that he was very interested in participating. I asked him the preliminary questions, which he answered

correctly so I proceeded to set a time to meet. When I asked if I could meet with him at his home, he was quiet; and I sensed that other options would be necessary. I stated that if he preferred, we could meet any place such as the library, an office, or a restaurant. Joseph preferred to be interviewed at a restaurant. As I tried to arrange a date and time, he hesitated and said that he didn't have a car so it was going to take him some time to figure out when to meet with me. He would have to arrange for someone to take him to the restaurant and pick him up, which could be a problem. I offered to pick him up and he quickly agreed. I asked if there was a particular place he wanted to go to but he had no preference.

I drove to Joseph's place on a weekday at around 6:00 p.m. Joseph lives in a mobile home in the east part of the city. As I drove down the small mobile home neighborhood where he lives, children, ranging in ages three through six, ran around barefooted on the unpaved, bumpy street. A group of Hispanic boys played football in the middle of the street and finally looked my way as I waited for them to move. Broken down cars sat in the yards, and chairs were strewn around the grassless yards. A man with a bandana tied around his head, wearing a white undershirt, and baggy pants leaned over and looked under the hood of a car. He paid no attention to the children running around. A group of men standing next to another car held opened bottles of beer, and listened to loud Mexican music. They looked intently as I drove slowly by in front of them. As I approached the address given to me by Joseph, there was a shirtless overweight white man tending to some artificial flowers in his very small yard. I parked the car in the street and knocked on the door.

Joseph quickly came out looking refreshed and neatly dressed in Dockers and a pressed sports shirt. When he saw me, he smiled widely, and gave me his hand. His facial features were tense and his dark eyes looked straight at me. His body is a bit intense as we walk together to the car. Joseph has a deep clear voice that projects well. He speaks without a trace of an accent. As he got in the car, he asked if I had any trouble following the directions he had given me. Then he eagerly inquired about the study and how his story might impact other Hispanic students. I could sense his nervousness as he held his hands together tightly. We made small talk, and I asked him about his present job. He eagerly explained his job and the projects he was doing. We drove to a restaurant and sat at a booth. He is a very likeable, friendly, well-mannered young man, and very polite. When the waitress brings us something, he thanked her and smiled at her.

Joseph is a friendly, single 26 year old, about 5 feet 11 inches tall. He has a slim build, dark hair parted to the side, a thin mustache, and an olive complexion. He has dark eyes, and a smile on his almost tense face. As soon as we met, he seemed to talk easily about home, school, and his experience. Even though he shared information about his experiences, he chose his words carefully as he answered the questions, or expressed his views on family, home, and school. At times, he leaned forward across the table as he spoke about past experiences. He was very frank about things that occurred at home and school. One comment he made was that he believed in doing whatever he could to give back to the community, especially when it came to younger people so that they could have a good start. "I believe that education is the key. I'll be glad to answer any

questions if it will help young people complete their high school education.”

Joseph is a 1999 graduate of Ben Franklin High School in the south part of the city. After graduating from high school, he went to work for his uncle’s company constructing office furniture. He has lived on his own for several years but presently one of his cousins, who is still attending high school, is living with him. According to Joseph, his cousin is having difficulties at home, so this is his way of helping the family out.

Joseph’s Story

Joseph is third generation Mexican American. He is employed full time as a furniture builder working on building cubicles for office spaces. His uncle owns the company where he works. He likes the work and feels he has a special talent for it, because his father was a builder. He has lived alone since he graduated from Franklin high school. He decided to live on his own because he believes that a grown son needs to be independent. When he comes home, he enjoys watching television, reading, and writing. Currently, he is learning Japanese on his own and says he decided to do this on a whim. He and his cousin went to the library and checked out audiotapes to teach themselves. One of the things he thought about doing was learning Mandarin but he felt that there were more opportunities for a person who knew Japanese than one who spoke Chinese.

I still have that drive to learn. I’ve always wanted to enter either a junior college or university. UT is a great school and one of my top choices, since it’s here at home. I always imagined myself there

but it's too expensive. I wanted to be a liberal arts major and work on becoming a writer. I think about enrolling somewhere but unfortunately my budget is rather tight right now. I've looked into grants and things like that, but I haven't been able to make it back to school. The only thing I can do right now is focus on learning whatever I can pick up on my own. I checked out the tapes and books to learn Japanese from the library. I keep abreast of what's going on by reading or watching the news. I still love writing.

On Sundays, Joseph spends time visiting his mother and her husband who live in a small town approximately fifteen miles from Austin. Being close to his family is very important to Joseph and he takes this opportunity to get together with his siblings. His sister lives in her own house in the same town as her mother. The youngest brother still lives at home, but his two other brothers live on their own.

Joseph talked about going to college if he can save enough money. He wants to attend the University of Texas, or any university close to Austin, and major in writing. He has dreams of becoming a writer one day. He does not want to move far from his family. Applying for financial assistance is something he wants to do in the future.

Family

Joseph is the second oldest child in a family of four boys and one girl and grew up in a single parent home. Joseph's grandparents, his mother, uncles, and aunts were all born in Texas, and they all graduated from high school. He stated that the most successful persons in his family are his aunt and uncle. He proudly said that his aunt has a college degree and is a registered nurse and her husband owns a successful construction company. "He has been building homes for more than 30 years and is doing extremely well economically." Joseph eagerly shared that his aunt and uncle own

numerous properties in the Austin area. He is also very proud of all his immediate family members because despite obstacles, each one of them earned a high school diploma or the equivalent.

When Joseph was six years old, his parents divorced and decided to split the custody of the children. His mother kept his sister and the two youngest boys, and his father took custody of Joseph and his oldest brother. His father remarried during the time they lived with him. After approximately two years, the second marriage broke up and his father went back to Mexico. He gave custody of the two boys back to the mother. Joseph was nine years old when he last saw his father. His voice dropped and his dark eyes and expression saddened as he described his childhood as a time when they were very poor and moved around “quite a bit” and when they often had little adult supervision.

We were very poor when we were very young. After my dad left us, my mother was alone and didn't have a job. She had five children to raise all by herself and we were all very young. In order for my mother to survive, she had to get on welfare. All these events made growing up a bit difficult my first fifteen years of life. Since we were on welfare, we seemed to move around a lot. This was hard on us, because we had to move to a different school every time we moved. There was a time when we were doing well. My mother had a really nice boyfriend who helped us out for about four years. Sometimes adults have difficulties getting along so when things didn't work out between them, he moved out.

Since he was from a single parent family, Joseph saw his mother as the most influential person in keeping him in school. She supported his decisions and counted on him to help with his siblings. According to Joseph, his mother did not badger him when he decided to continue working and not attend school. He felt that she trusted him to make the right decision.

She didn't support the idea of my leaving school very much but since I was almost an adult, she was allowing me the space to make my own decision. I believe she felt that I was going to make the right decision, and in the end, I did. She had a lot of trust in her kids to make the right choice.

By trusting him and treating him as an adult, Joseph stressed, it encouraged him to make the decision to go back and graduate from high school.

Joseph described his mother as the person responsible for all their success stories. All her children have a high school diploma because "we pretty much learned from her example." When Joseph was thirteen years old, a tragic accident that physically incapacitated his youngest brother, changing things dramatically for the entire family. The children were caring for each other at the time, because his mother was working overtime most of the time so that she could get them out of the welfare system.

She wasn't there a lot of times because she was always working double shifts. She would be offered extra work so she was working a lot. Since she wasn't home to supervise us, we were doing a lot of things we weren't supposed to do. Being outside unsupervised, arguing and breaking dishes, damaging stuff, and getting angry with each other. We didn't have anyone there to tell us that it was wrong and to keep us in line.

Since the mother left them unattended until late in the evening with Joseph "in charge," albeit only thirteen years old, the Child Protective Services Agency found her to be negligent and removed the children from the home. They placed the children in two different foster homes for a month, and then moved them with their aunt for one year. In order to get custody of her children, his mother had to attend parenting classes, find an appropriate place for the family to live, and schedule regular work hours so that she would not leave the children unattended. Joseph stated that she did everything they told

her so that she could have the family back. He described the situation as:

This was a very trying time for all of us. It was very hard to be away from somebody so close to us, somebody we all loved. We were placed in a foster home for about a month before being placed with my aunt. Even though she was a part of our family, we wanted to be together with my mother and youngest brother again. When we were together again, we all expressed appreciation for it. We listened more and tried to behave better than we had before the accident. I know my sister and I tried to behave in a more mature manner.

This event contributed to Joseph's belief that he needed to do whatever he could to help keep the family together. It also led to a great admiration for his mother. His goal became to be the best son, and the one to cause her less worry. He became the one she could count on for help, since two of his brothers ended up in trouble with the law.

Because I was always making the right choices, as we were growing up, my mother looked to me for help whenever the others were having problems. She would consult me about problems and would ask for my help in finding different solutions. The two of us would work together to see what could be done.

Joseph's mother was not involved in the Parent Teachers Association or booster clubs, but she did attend parent conferences. When she came home from work, she asked the children if they had their homework done and checked on their progress. She checked their report cards and told the children how happy she was that they were getting good grades. "She didn't have enough money to give us allowances, but she let us know how happy she was that we were getting good grades."

All of Joseph's siblings received their high school diplomas. The oldest brother graduated from high school and went on to complete a two-year course at the ITT Technical Institute. His sister graduated from the alternative high school in Austin. The

second from the youngest brother is spending time in prison for a variety of offenses but completed his GED while incarcerated. Joseph explained that this brother blamed himself for the accident and this caused him to be rebellious. He had been in trouble with the law for several years and incarcerated several times. Even with counseling, he had trouble dealing with the guilt. Recently his brother communicated to the family that he was doing better and had completed all the high school requirements.

Joseph sees his relationship with his siblings as close, especially between him and his sister. He attributes the closeness to his sister to them both being more mature and intellectually compatible. They relate to each other a bit more since they were never apart during the time they were taken from their mother. He and his oldest brother are not as close. His oldest brother was pretty much on his own since he was 15 years old. At the time of the accident, that brother was in a juvenile facility. When he got out, he lived with them only a short time and then moved out on his own.

School Experience

Joseph attended the Austin ISD schools from Kindergarten through 12th grade. He attended several elementary schools and Pueblo Middle School in the west part of town. During high school, he attended both Murray High School and Franklin High School. He attended Murray High school for one year before moving to Franklin when the family moved to a different address. He described high school as a good experience, especially at Franklin. He felt more comfortable there and ultimately received his diploma there.

In school, Joseph saw himself as an introverted person who kept things bottled up inside. He focused on his homework and always got good grades but never had the opportunity to participate in extra curricular activities. Because the district bused him to school and his mother worked, Joseph felt he could not participate in any extracurricular activities. Even though the school provided some transportation for students staying late, he needed to be home to baby-sit.

Being introverted was largely due to his family's financial situation. He saw poverty as a drawback because the students made fun of him.

Being in elementary school was very hard for me because I was ridiculed about being poor and having to wear hand-me-downs. I never had enough supplies or the things other children had. In middle school, I wanted to look like the other kids and wear the type of clothing they did. Since we were on welfare, that was quite impossible for my mother to purchase the same kind of clothing as the other children wore. This led me to be more of a loner. At times, I would feel jealous; but that never stopped me from wanting to succeed and making my mom happy by bringing home good grades.

During his middle school years, while being bused to a high socioeconomic school, he had feelings of unworthiness "especially being around rich students." He saw them as "having it all." This caused resentment about having to go to Payless Shoe store and other discount stores to get what the family needed for school. "It's troubling for a child that has to go through not having many opportunities, or not having all the things they're supposed to have. You realize that all you have are just the bare necessities."

In both elementary and middle school, Joseph loved report card time, because he looked forward to reading the comments the teachers wrote on his report cards. The comments were always very positive, and his grades were As and Bs. He looked

forward to showing his mother his report card. “I knew that she would be very proud of me. She wouldn’t give us money, but she would tell us how proud she was that we were doing so well.”

Murray High School, which Joseph attended first, is on the east side of Austin and has a diverse ethnic population and a mixed socioeconomic student population. The largest ethnic group in the school then was African-American. Joseph enrolled in honors classes during his high school years because he felt that the regular classes did not provide the same opportunities or weren’t as challenging. He took the TAAS tests while enrolled at Murray and received Academic Recognition in all three tests. He was especially proud of his TAAS Writing because he received a perfect score. He only missed one question on both the Math and Reading tests. Even though he felt that he received a more rigorous education at Murray, he felt more comfortable and connected at Franklin. Franklin High School is in the south part of the city, and had a less diverse ethnic and socioeconomic population. The largest ethnic group at the school was Hispanic. Joseph felt that he was comfortable there because of his connection with the English teachers, since writing is what he loved. The love of writing began in middle school when his English teacher praised him highly for an anthology he wrote. She was so impressed with the anthology that she asked to keep it. He declined to give it to her since he himself was so proud of the work.

I remember my English teacher, at Hudson Middle School, really liked an anthology I wrote. I had poems written by Robert Frost. I think I wrote the Fire and Ice poem, and the “two roads diverge” poem. I reflected on those and I also wrote some poetry of my own. The English teacher loved it. It always made me feel good to make the teachers

happy. I couldn't give her the anthology because I was very proud of my work and wanted to keep it. I still have it.

When asked if he felt that the schools prepared him well, he said that schools did well with students that were already motivated and paid attention in class. He thought the teachers were quite good for the most part, but there were some that were still quite new and struggling. Joseph continued to enroll in honors classes throughout his high school. "I had a desire to educate myself, so I knew that I wouldn't have the same opportunities in regular classes that I would in honors classes."

Teachers were a very important part of his entire school life. In high school, after receiving his TAAS scores, he felt that his teachers showed their support because they were the ones rather than the students who congratulated him on his success. His aim was always to be a good student for his teachers, because they were good to students like him. "Teachers want students like I was. Students that paid attention in class and wanted to learn." He perceived that teachers who had good students were always happy to teach them, so he wanted to make sure that they were happy teachers.

For Joseph, the praise from his teachers was very important. He proudly recounted comments his teachers made about his writing:

My senior year at Franklin, my A.P. English teacher told me that I was aspiring to become a novelist. I'll never forget the 99 he gave me for a story I wrote. For an AP course, that is very good. He only knocked off one point for a grammatical error. As for the content of the story, he thought it was awesome.

This teacher's comment was especially significant to Joseph because he had started to

write a novel when he was a 14-year-old high school freshman. He still keeps it and often thinks about finishing it some day. He depicted his novel as a “sort of suspenseful type book” and he summarized it.

I wrote about six chapters but I intended to write twelve or thirteen. It was about a guy in a mental institution who escapes and makes his way across land to avoid things. He was having trouble inside his own mind so while he was running away from authority, he was also running away from himself. It was like he was going deeper and deeper into insanity, sort of speak. I thought it was pretty good for such a young person to write something like that. I always had thoughts like that in my head.

Writing became an outlet for Joseph and perhaps continues to be one for him. He felt he was good at it and it was an area where he got noticed. He stated that he continues to write today but had not touched the novel he started.

At Murray High School, he described his role as someone there to help but not someone who would volunteer to be a mentor to other students. His teachers saw him as someone they could count on when needed.

I remember Mr. Watson, my science teacher, telling me that I was a good student of his. When we went on a field trip to the San Antonio Zoo, a couple of students were having trouble with the teacher’s assignment. They followed me around with the questionnaire all day. They needed help understanding how to fill it out so I was there to help them.

When asked about the quality of teachers he felt he had, he stated that some were really good, but others still needed more experience since they were new to teaching. As an example of a teacher having difficulty, he talked about his interaction with a teacher in his regular algebra class. She was an experienced teacher but had discipline problems with some of the students. While he characterized her as a nice teacher, he stated that her

concentration problems were due to the bad behavior of some students. At one time, she modeled a problem incorrectly, so he pointed out the error. He saw this not as an attempt to correct the teacher but as a way to help get her back on track.

She was a nice teacher but some of the students were really bad. She had trouble concentrating because they would distract her. I guess I was one of the students who helped her stay focused. When I pointed out the error in one of the logarithm problems, she wasn't offended. She double checked and said, "oh yeah, you're right, that was the correct answer." It felt good, not correcting the teacher, but helping her get back on focus.

In comparison, he recounted that the teachers at Pueblo Middle School were extremely knowledgeable and prepared. Pueblo Middle School is located in the central part of the city and has a high enrollment of high socioeconomic students. Many of the children from low socioeconomic families were bused in from the east side of the city. Joseph was one of the students bused from the eastside.

In contrast to his pride in his teachers' positive comments and feelings about him, he stated, "although I had good relationships with my teachers, they weren't personal relationships. They were more on a professional basis. I was the student and they were the teachers."

Joseph was not involved in any extra curricular activities during middle school or high school. "I wasn't attracted to sports. I was more academically oriented. Usually the thing holding me back was peer pressure about being too academic." He was invited to join the National Honor Society while attending Murray High School but declined the invitation. He stated that it was not the right time to join. He thought about joining the track team since he loved running. However, he changed his mind because he feared not measuring up to his own standards, or disappointing others. Even though he was physically active, he was not interested in sports. "I was more worried about school

rather than trying to be popular, or trying to fit in with other groups.”

Peers

Pressure for Joseph came from his neighborhood peers, because they saw him as trying to put him above them. This occurred because he took a lot of honor classes and they wanted him to be “normal” like they were. They accused him of thinking he was better than they. In contrast, he believed that if he behaved as they did, it would have caused him to lower his own expectations of himself.

I had a very good head on my shoulders; and I wasn't going to let them determine who my friends were going to be, or how I was going to be treated. I shrugged off their comments. When it got to me, I used physical exercise to deal with the pressure.

He had friends whom he described as “just working to get by” and others who were focused on being at the top of the class. These two groups sometimes created conflicts for him. They asked him to stop hanging out with the nerds, or geeks. This pressure upset him at times and he would give in to their taunts.

Finding a peer group was difficult for Joseph, because he continued to see the economic differences between himself and others in his honor classes. Although his family was no longer living on the welfare system, he still had a sense that he might not be as good as others. He believed that living in a low socioeconomic neighborhood communicated a sense of not having a good background and not being as good as others. “I lived in the type of neighborhood that was not considered a safe one, or one of the better neighborhoods in the city.”

Sticking to people who were “sort of normal,” was one way that he dealt with the

conflict. Being “sort of normal,” meant that often friends did not have the same aspirations as he did, but they were from the same socioeconomic group. His small group of closest friends was from his neighborhood. They rode the bus together and some visited him at home. At times they would venture to the wooded area in the neighborhood. He described the group as “the ones that weren’t aspiring to be at the top of the class. They just aspired to make the grades to get them through school.”

Dropping Out

When asked why he thought some students dropped out, Joseph had several reasons. He commented that several of his close friends had dropped out of school because their parents were uninterested in their education. “They didn’t look at report cards, attend school functions, provide any positive feedback to their children, or show any interest in their schooling. Other parents were busy with their own lives and didn’t make time to get involved in their children’s education.” He mentioned that a major reason many of his friends dropped out was due to experimentation with drugs. When he was at Franklin high school, the area behind the gymnasium was the place students would congregate to smoke cigarettes and share drugs.

When asked if he himself had ever considered dropping out of school, Joseph recounted a time in his senior year. He was torn between keeping up with his school work and continuing to work at his job after school. Working until midnight or two in the morning, while also taking honor classes was quite demanding. Work was important to him, because he had his own car and was making money. This difficult schedule and

his own experimentation with drugs were factors contributing to his considering dropping out of school. For a young person who felt that he had never had the same things as others, having his own car and money were very important. Joseph talked about the debates he had with himself over the situation and what things influenced his decision to stay in school. He knew that he was very close to graduating, and that he did not want to work in a fast food place the rest of his life. His best chance to have a better life was to obtain a good education by finishing high school. The thought of his mother being disappointed in him was also a consideration. He knew that even though she had made her case, he needed to make the decision himself. He believed that in her heart, she knew that he would do the right thing since he had been the one who had always done well in school and stayed out of trouble. During the month that he stopped attending classes, the school withdrew him. When he returned to school a month later, he found everyone to be very helpful in getting him to do what was necessary to graduate on time.

Joseph's Parent

Joseph identified his mother as the person in his life that influenced his decision to stay in school. When asked if there were other people who would give me more information about his story, he said no. He thought it would be best that I interview his mother. There was eagerness in his voice and smile as he gave me her telephone number and the times to reach her.

I called Mrs. Paredes several times and left messages but got no response.

Finally after the fourth attempt, she answered the telephone. I explained the reason why I contacted her and the purpose of my research. I also informed her that I could meet with her at any time or place that was convenient for her. Mrs. Paredes works in Austin but lives in a neighboring city, so I thought that might be a concern. Mrs. Paredes responded that she really had a difficult schedule and would not be able to meet with me at any time. I sensed that this was not something she wanted to do and perhaps Joseph had not known how she felt about it. Offering the option to speak with me over the telephone, she stated that it would be fine, but she only had a few minutes because she was very busy. She spoke with me on the telephone for approximately twenty to twenty-five minutes and then stated that she needed to go but would call me back. She recited my telephone number that was probably on her caller id and I confirmed the number.

When I asked Mrs. Paredes what Joseph was like, she described him as a very studious boy who always liked school. He would come home and do his homework. She never had any problems with him. “Joseph did his work. I never had any trouble from him. He liked school a lot.”

She was not very forthcoming with additional information other than answering in short answers. She saw him as a quiet boy that works hard. “He graduated from Murray High School.” When asked if he ever complained about not wanting to finish school, she stated that he had, but he decided to go back. He was working and had a car so he thought he just wanted to work. I asked what her reaction to that was, and she responded that she was not happy:

I told him that it was important that he finish school if he wanted to get a good job. He's got a good head on his shoulders so he decided that he wanted to graduate and went back. Well, I have lots to do and I have to go. I'll call you back when I have time.

Mrs. Paredes never called back.

After the interview with Mrs. Paredes, I called Joseph to ask for a different person I might interview. Joseph never returned my calls. Although Joseph was eager to participate and share his story, once his mother had conversed with me he never returned phone calls. I believe that Mrs. Paredes preferred not to relive that part of their lives, and I respect her wishes.

School Personnel

The positive feedback Joseph's teachers gave him about his behavior, academic performance, and being a model student, had a tremendous influence on how he felt about school. He believed that he had a good relationship with his teachers, but it was a professional relationship. When asked if there had been a specific person that he had gone to, or could go to, if he had a problem, Joseph did not have a name. His remembrance was of occasions when he received compliments about his work and his behavior, or when staff asked him to help other students.

As I visited the campus and spoke with the person who gave me his name, they could not recall much about Joseph. The campus registrar had selected the names randomly from the school records of Hispanic graduates, and sent them to me so she did not necessarily know the students. I spoke to teachers and assistant principals from the school from which he graduated, but no one recalled him. This is not unusual, since he

described himself as a person who did what he was supposed to all the time, but was not involved in any extracurricular activities or organizations.

Reflections

Of the three participants, Joseph was most at risk to dropout of school. His mother was on welfare, they moved frequently, and the family was dysfunctional after the accident. Joseph spoke about becoming a more responsible and mature person after the accident that resulted in Child Protective Services removing them from the home. The injury to his youngest brother affected every member of the family in negative and positive ways. Joseph decided that his role was to make sure that everyone was all right. Joseph does not speak about his own feelings of responsibility about the accident itself. However, it seems that the event changed his willingness to participate in after-school activities. The family's economic situation perhaps was another factor that drove his decision not to participate in after-school activities. He often spoke of feelings of inferiority because they were poor. He believed that in his honors classes, he was still seen as different by higher income students because he was poor. Valenzuela (1999) found that students chose peer groups that supported their views of who they were in the context of school. Joseph wanted to be part of the "smart kids" group, but the neighborhood peer pressure stood in the way. Since he had to make a choice, he chose a peer group from his neighborhood. It was a necessary choice if he was to survive in his neighborhood. He chose friends that had some interest in school even though he believed it was not exactly the same as his.

Joseph has great respect for his mother and the struggles she has gone through.

Her approval is very important to him. The trust she had in him to make the right decision influenced his decision to graduate from high school. He saw himself as the one that his mom relied on to be a role model for his siblings. He also voiced that in order to get anywhere, you needed an education. Fine and Weis (1999) cite that young men and women of today's poor and working class see acquiring an education as a way to achieve more fulfilling lives.

Even though her support of school was not overt, such as by attending PTA meetings, or attending their programs, she did show an interest in how they were doing in school, and made sure that they had what they needed for school. Joseph felt that her example of working hard to get her family back influenced his school performance. He attended school regularly and made good grades, because he wanted his mother to be proud of him and did not want to let her down. He strongly believes that family is one of the most important things in his life; and for that reason, he stays close to home. He visits his mother every week and has established a positive relationship with her new husband.

Miguel Barrera

Introduction

S The interviews with Miguel Barrera occurred at restaurants in the city where he currently lives. He did not come to Austin very often since he was working and going to school. We first corresponded through email and then spoke on the telephone to set up the times to meet. He had not responded sooner because he had been in school, and his

mother had held onto the letter. She holds on to any correspondence he receives until he comes home to visit on weekends. He tries to come about once a month or on special occasions.

Miguel is about 5' 6" tall, a little stocky, has olive skin, brown eyes, black hair and walks with a casual, relaxed step. He is personable, smiles easily, and is very friendly. He shook my hand and smiled as soon as he saw me approach. He was interested in sharing his story to help other “Latino” students.

Miguel graduated from John F. Kennedy High School in Spring 1999. He was the president of the senior class and addressed the graduating class. He was in the top ten of his graduating class. He was a member of the National Honor Society, the football team, and the National Hispanic Institute.

Miguel's Story

When we first met, Miguel was a second semester senior in college, looking forward to graduating with a degree in communication. He was single and living on his own. His cousin, who was a college student, had just moved in with him and they divide the expenses. Miguel stated that this helps his financial situation. When Miguel first moved to the city, he stayed with his aunt and uncle for one semester but felt he really needed to be more independent.

Miguel attended college out of state for two years on a fully paid scholarship the National Hispanic Institute gave to him. The National Hispanic Institute is an organization that provides leadership opportunities to young Hispanic students who are

identified as high achieving students in high school. In addition to the NHI scholarship, he received a four-year competitive edge engineering scholarship from Wal-Mart. Miguel was unhappy with the major he had chosen, but worried about losing the scholarship money. Since he had to pay out of state tuition, the cost of schooling was high and not something that his family could provide. At the end of his sophomore year, he decided to come home for the summer. He spoke with his parents about his unhappiness and also about his love for the school he was presently attending. Jointly they decided that he could not continue to attend an out-of-state university due to the prohibitive cost. Miguel worked to save money to return to college, applied and received a Pell grant, and several loans to continue his studies. He enrolled in a college in Texas that fall, and changed his major. His parents were very supportive of his decision. During the last two years, Miguel worked while attending college. He changed his major to public relations and felt that he made the right choice.

The last time I met with Miguel, he had graduated with a Bachelors degree in communication. We met at his work place and he gave me a tour before we walked to a small outdoor restaurant in the neighborhood. As he gave me a tour of his new work place, I was touched when he introduced me as his friend to one of the Hispanic women who own the company. Miguel beams as he tells me about the different purposes for the various rooms in the office building, transformed from a small five room house in a historic part of the city. As we walk to the restaurant, he told me that he loves his job because he gets to meet interesting people. At the present time, he was helping with the promotion of a project for a famous former politician. Miguel proudly talks about

meeting him and how impressive the man is. Then he asked me what radio station I had been listening to on my trip to meet with him, because one of their clients had just launched a new radio station with no commercials. As we walked along to the restaurant, he continued chatting about his new job. He appeared more comfortable and relaxed than at our previous meeting.

The next step for Miguel is working for a couple of years and then going back to school to get his masters in Political Science. He talked about becoming a politician or owning his own public relations firm. The company that he works with right now is a public relations firm that has numerous clients who are politicians. He sees this as an opportunity to learn and advance.

Family

Miguel is a third generation Mexican American who comes from an intact family. He is the third child in a family of five. He has two older brothers, a younger brother and a sister who is the youngest in the family. All his brothers graduated from high school and college, and are married. His sister is still in high school and is planning to attend college and become a pediatrician.

Miguel described his childhood as a time when they were very poor. They lived in a very small house that was not really designed for a family with five children.

Since we were very poor and lived in a very small house. There was no extra room to play Nintendo or be alone. My brothers and I shared the same room so we had to get along. Of course there were always territorial battles between my older brothers and my younger brother and me. It's an interesting dynamic when you grow up literally "very close."

Both of Miguel's parents graduated from high school. His mother received a full paid scholarship to Wellesley when she graduated from high school but only attended one year. When Miguel was in high school, his mother went back to school. He stated with admiration, "It was very motivating to see my mother return to school while we were still in school ourselves. It's hard work when you're also raising a family."

Miguel's parents decided to make some sacrifices in order to have his mother stay home with the children instead of going to work to help out with the finances. They believed that the mother staying at home was the key to raising children to be successful. When Miguel came home from school, his mother was there. "My mom was always there with us. She stayed home to take care of us." He remembers that she made sure that they did their homework as soon as they got home before going outside to play. His parents regulated how much television they were allowed to watch. They were not allowed to watch television when they got home and above all they were not allowed to watch MTV.

When they were of preschool age, she taught them to count in both languages and to write their names. Miguel recalled the different activities that his mother did with them. She read books to them in both English and Spanish, took them to the park, or to play with other children at their houses, or she took them to the library story hour.

His parents were always very supportive of the schools they attended and were actively involved in different organizations and activities. This was especially true of his father who quit his state job while Miguel and his brothers attended Rodriguez Middle School, and took a job as a parent specialist at the school. His father wanted to

be more involved in the school to help his children and the entire community. By taking the school position, his father took a reduction in salary. This impacted the entire family; but he felt strongly enough that he needed to support the school district's improvement efforts. Miguel described both his parents as always wanting to get involved in the community, and one way they did it was through their church. Both parents taught Confraternity of Catholic Doctrine (CCD) classes during the time that Miguel and his brothers prepared for their first communion and confirmation. Miguel thought it was very impressive to see his parents involved in the schools, the community, and particularly as teachers.

Miguel described his parents as supportive of all their children's efforts academically as well as in their extra curricular activities. They were very involved in different ways throughout his school life. He recalled his mother's participation: She attended all field days, PTA meetings, booster club meetings, his football games, and NHI banquets. His father not only attended all the events, meetings, and conferences, but also was involved as an officer in the booster clubs and the Parent Teacher Association.

His parents knew their children's friends and created their home as a safe place to bring their friends. Miguel referred to this as the good times:

My parents were very open about bringing friends home. I first saw this with my brothers. They would bring their friends over during the day and even for sleepovers, especially for birthday parties. They'd get pizza, rent movies, hang out, and play football outside. When friends were over, our parents would talk to them and get to know them. It was a very warm environment, and they

had a positive, friendly attitude with anybody we'd bring over. We brought a lot of our teammates over to the house.

His parents treated him and each of his siblings as an individual and not as one to be compared to any other, according to Miguel. This was very important to him, because he felt that they each had a tendency to be competitive, especially in sports. "They always told us that they didn't want to compare us and make us feel that we weren't as good as one of our other brothers." This was especially critical to Miguel because of an incident that occurred at Rodriguez Middle School with one of his coaches who consistently compared him to his brothers. There was one incident when he asked Miguel if he was a lazy Mexican. Miguel felt embarrassed and insulted so immediately reported this to his father.

What was amazing was that the coach was also Hispanic. My parents are quite vocal as far as it comes to communicating concerns to teachers, or administrators, if we have problems at school. My Dad spoke with him and the next day the coach apologized to me and the entire class. My Dad was my hero that day!

Miguel's parents also supported him when he decided to give up football due to a very serious knee injury that occurred during his junior year. His father told him that he still had his whole life ahead of him. His father's advice was, "Playing football in high school is fun; but when you turn 30 years old, you'll have new problems. You won't be able to play with your kids, because you decided to go all out in high school." This convinced Miguel that he needed to take a different path. He did not play football his senior year.

When I asked Miguel why he stayed in school and why he did well, he immediately responded that it was his family. He felt that if his two older brothers had

finished school, he could do it too. Since they were successful, there was no reason he couldn't be successful.

The relationship between Miguel and his brothers is still very close. He looks up to them and sees his second oldest brother as his role model. This may have influenced Miguel to excel academically, set high goals for himself, and decide to major in engineering in college. His brother was recruited to a college preparatory school at the end of middle school due to his SAT scores. Miguel was his brother's best man when he got married. They keep in touch by email since his brother lives in Europe.

We thought of him as the Doogie Howser of the family. He did really well in school and received a full paid scholarship that not only paid tuition, room and board, but also airfare to come home during holidays, spring break, and the summer. It was really nice get to see him. After high school, he received a scholarship to attend Stanford University. He graduated in four and a half years and studied abroad in Germany. He's a mechanical engineer. For a time, I was interested in engineering but I found that was not my forte.

The special relationship that Miguel has with his brothers may be due to the role the brothers played with the younger siblings. When he was entering high school, his brothers warned him about parties he would be invited to attend. He was told not to give in to peer pressure. "They said, 'you have friends that go to parties and drink, but just because they do, doesn't mean you have to.' I felt like they were my coaches." At the same time, Miguel took the same role when his younger brother arrived in high school. "I hung around with my middle brother during middle school, so when my younger brother started high school, he and I hung around together." Miguel saw his role as a mentor to his brother, letting him know what was going on and giving advice. He smiled and stated, "but he was a little more rebellious than I was."

When Miguel was attending college out of state, he informed his oldest brother about job opportunities in the city where he was living. His brother moved there and found a job. He still lives there with his wife and child.

Miguel stressed the importance of visiting with extended family. He visits his grandparents who live in the same city where he is working. During the summer, his mother would take them to spend a couple of weeks visiting their grandparents. As the children got older, the trips to the city were less frequent. In return, their grandparents, aunts and uncles all came to their football games, their graduations, and any activities they were invited too. “It was great to look up into the stands and see my grandparents watching me play.”

School Experience

Miguel attended Austin ISD schools from Kindergarten through 12th grade, moving to a new school only once during his entire school years. He attended private preschool a few days a week instead of the district’s pre-kindergarten program, because the district did not offer it at his elementary school. The elementary school he attended was only a block away from his home, so he walked to school with his brothers. His house was also close to the high school so he could also walk to high school. Any time he missed the school bus, he would walk to school. He did have to ride the bus, or his father dropped him off, when he attended Rodriguez Middle School. He consistently had good attendance at school, never skipped school, and states he was not one of those persons who could be persuaded to go to the arcade instead of class.

When I asked Miguel to talk about his school experiences, he was very reflective and discussed his experiences in elementary and middle school. He spoke extensively about high school where he was very involved in sports and other extra curricular activities, and where he blossomed as a leader.

Even though Miguel said elementary school was fun, he focused on the cruelty aimed at him by other children because of his chubbiness. He described himself as an introvert who made the best of it by finding a best friend whom the other students also mistreated.

Kids laughed at my size and that was hard on my self-esteem and made me act like a really tough kid. I made friends with boy named Tom, an Anglo, who was a really big guy. He was a little taller than me but just as smart. We befriended each other. Our friendship helped get us through elementary school. Since we were bigger, kids only engaged us in verbal fights. I remember telling my dad what was happening. He said something really important to me: "It doesn't matter what other people say about you, it's what you think about yourself." That has always stuck with me.

Miguel continued his friendship with Tom through middle school but they went their separate ways in high school. Since they were both smart, they had several classes together in middle school and high school. "We're still friends but we're not as close as we used to be in the early grades."

When Miguel entered Rodriguez Middle School, the gang dress was in style. The movies promoted the bandanas, the loose shirts, and baggy pants. This was very attractive to Miguel especially in sixth grade when he made friends with a student whose brother was in a gang. He started wearing gang-like clothing to fit in with his new friend. His friend constantly urged Miguel to join the gang but he declined. He told his friend

that he would hang around with him but not join. The main reason he cites is the ritual boys have to go through to join. “To join, you had to get “jumped on” (beaten up by the other members of the gang) but I knew that I didn’t want that to happen.”

During this time, his father stepped in and spoke with him. He told him that he’d seen boys become gang members in his own youth and had tried to help them make better decisions and do positive things. “I’ve been through that, and I don’t want you to go through it; it’s not something positive.” Miguel has always respected his father’s advice and believes that the talk kept him from crossing the line into the gang status.

Miguel described middle school as an unsafe environment where gang members constantly tried to recruit others. The students were afraid to turn in gang members for fear of retribution:

By arriving before classes started, you had time to hang out and socialize. Unfortunately it was really an unsafe time to get there. Kids would get jumped on when they went to the bathroom. If you walked into the bathroom and somebody was jumping somebody else, they would pull you in too. I almost got pulled in one day. As I opened the door, they tried to grab me. They ripped my shirt. We knew what would happen if we told.

By seventh grade, the glamour of gang life left him, and Miguel focused on sports. The coaches discouraged students from hanging around with the gang members and were very outspoken about it. In eighth grade, they selected him to participate in a Principal’s Advisory Council to improve things at Rodriguez. This gave him and other students the venue they needed to let the administration know what was happening, how students were being intimidated, and how communication could be improved between the teachers and students. The students felt that they could not trust the adults in the

school because they would not listen. Miguel feels that this one action by the principal, Mr. Coulter, was a positive step. The students finally felt they had a voice in making things at school safe. This gave him a taste of leadership. For the first time, he saw that positive things could happen if one got involved.

According to Miguel, the high school he attended was a very diverse institution ethnically, culturally and socially. This diversity appealed to him, and he saw it as a positive thing. He estimated that the ethnic break down at the time was 30 - 40% Hispanic, 30-35% White, 10-15% African-American and the rest Asian, Indian, or other. As in other urban cities, some of the students gravitated toward different cliques and gangs. A few of the student groups, such as the African-American cliques or gangs, and the Mexican American gangs, formed along ethnic lines. Other groups that Miguel said existed were the Goths, the skinheads, the football clique, the baseball clique, the band members, and the dance team. "Some unaffiliated girls joined guy groups to be popular, but most of them just walked around. The Asians dispersed themselves amongst the different groups. Most joined the preppy group."

Even though Miguel didn't belong to any particular clique, he tried to mingle with different groups. As a football player, he did have a few more friends in that particular group.

During our interviews, Miguel spoke proudly about his involvement in several organizations during his high school years and the leadership positions he held. The most important participation was in the National Hispanic Institute program. He didn't know how he was selected, or why, but he credited his participation in this program with

building his self-confidence and his leadership skills.

Honestly, I don't know how I was selected. Perhaps a teacher recommendation since I don't remember ever applying for it. I was a freshman at the time. Someone came to my class and called some of us out. We met with a person and were asked to fill out an application. The requirements were that you had to be a Latino, or some part Latino in your heritage, and have a 3.0 GPA.

Miguel's participation began in his freshman year; and every year he advanced to a different level of the NHI program, that focused on developing young Hispanic leaders that were in the top percentile of their class. As freshmen, they attended the four-day Young Leaders Conference. In their sophomore and junior years, they advanced to the eight day Lorenzo de Zavala Youth Legislative Session and participated in a Collegiate World Series Symposium. Sponsors and funds raised by the students paid for their expenses. Locally a banquet at the end of school served as recognition for the various accomplishments of these students. For Miguel and his team, this was especially significant, because they had won the debate competition.

"When I attended the Young Leaders Conference, I was excited meeting other motivated, high achieving Latinos from different schools. I even met four from my own school that I didn't know."

As a result of his participation in NHI, Miguel learned public speaking skills. He learned how to debate and make presentations to an assembly. The students held mock legislative sessions and went through the entire process from elections to making laws.

They also had the opportunity to visit university campuses. One advantage to participating in NHI was that you were motivated to keep your grades up because participating universities provided full scholarships to the students. I applied to the University of New

Mexico and was accepted. While at the university, I participated in NHI. I was a mentor to other Latino students that enrolled, and I took a leadership role in the organization. I also credit NHI for giving me the confidence to stand in front of a group and speak. When preparing for debate competitions, we learned to prepare quickly, speak clearly, and convince the judges that our point was the best one. I attribute my ability in public speaking to this training. My confidence increased when my team won the national debate competition.

When Miguel talked about gaining the confidence to speak in front of a crowd, he referred to the time that he ran for senior class president. Each candidate had to make a speech in front of the senior class. Miguel prepared his speech in advance, practiced it, and then gave it to the senior class. “As I gave my speech, the crowd went wild.” He received a standing ovation, and they elected him president of the senior class.

His senior year was not the only time that Miguel ran for class officer. He had been on the ballot since he was a sophomore but had never won. He characterized the elections in the lower grades as popularity contests. If you were known, you won. The majority of the times the winners were the cutest girls or handsomest guy, or a cheerleader or the leader of the football team. He felt that this was an unfair way to hold elections, because candidates didn’t get an opportunity to tell their classmates why they wanted to be elected, and what they hoped to accomplish. Even though he knew he would not get elected, he continued to place his name on the ballot as a matter of principle.

Miguel was a member of the National Honor Society. This is another organization that he believed students had difficulty participating in because no one clearly told them the requirements of the nomination process.

People who knew about NHS were told by either an upperclassman,

or they heard from older brothers or sisters. They'd speak with the sponsors and made their interest known. Their sheer determination and desire to participate in NHS helped them do what was necessary to be invited

When I asked how he was able to get into the National Honor Society, he explained that he was invited because he had a high GPA. Students had to be in the top ten percent of the class, or have a 3.2 GPA. He wasn't sure who turned in his name, but he assumed that it was a teacher. An office page delivered the letter to him during homeroom period. He doesn't recall anything ever being mailed to his parents unless it was a special event. His parents attended the induction ceremony because he informed them.

As a football player, his first position was playing offensive guard, blocking for the running back. He played in that position because of his size. "After I lost a lot of weight, they assigned me to be a defensive end." Miguel played this position until injured in his junior year. The injury occurred toward the end of the football season when they had only two games left to play. They won the two games and ended up playing additional games for the district title. Miguel insisted that he was not badly injured and put off going to the doctor until after the season had ended. The doctor was not happy with the decision Miguel made, because it was a serious injury. The doctor informed Miguel that he could no longer play football or any sports that required putting pressure on his knee. He decided to quit football after three months of filming practices because he felt he was overextending himself. He was very grateful of his coaches' willingness to continue to involve him in some way. He interpreted their actions as their way of supporting him.

He truly had a full schedule, since being class president involved working with ten officers to organize the senior prom. The class officers had to conduct fund-raising events, find sponsors, organize a banquet, hire a band, and create a prom theme. He and the class sponsors made sure to delegate tasks properly with checking points along the way. Of course this was in addition to keeping up his grade point average in order to qualify for scholarships and grants to go to college.

Since Miguel spoke so highly of his coaches, I asked what his other teachers were like. Miguel characterized the high school teachers as follows: “A lot of them were down to earth and tried to talk to students at their level. You could tell that some of them really cared for the students.” He explained that there were a few teachers he could go to if he had a problem. During middle school, he went to a math teacher. In high school, he had the chemistry teacher, the senior class sponsors, and in particular his government teacher.

Mr. Cross, my chemistry teacher for two years, really knew how to teach chemistry so that you could understand it. He won a state award for being a top chemistry teacher. Of course, there were two senior class sponsors who were there to provide support in case we ran into any problems. They were always very helpful. I can only remember the name of one of them.

When I asked him if there was ever a time when he had to go to someone for help other than his parents, he immediately spoke about Mr. Frank, his government teacher. He sought his help when he felt so overwhelmed with all the extracurricular activities and work he had that he wanted to drop the class because he failed a test. Mr. Frank had been at the school many years and often spoke about former students and how he had helped them. He was well respected by the students and had a reputation of

being a demanding but a fair teacher. All you had to do was be prepared for his class and you would pass.

I went to his office and I told him I knew I'd flunked the test because I hadn't studied. I told him all my problems. As I expressed my frustration, I got teary eyed. Mr. Frank listened and explained that this happened to many students like me. We get too involved and over extend ourselves. I remember his advice and still follow it. "Go home tonight, clear off your desk, put some music on, if you want, think, and make a list of everything you need to do. Start one by one, figure out when they're due, and prioritize them. When you look at it that way, things will be much easier. You just need to get yourself organized. I'll also give you an opportunity to retake that test." I was impressed by his generosity and willingness to help me.

Miguel called this a turning point. He learned organizational skills he badly need.

During college his organizational skills paid off since was the president of the NHI Collegiate Leadership Network, and also had to keep up academically to keep his scholarship. "I could do this because I learned to be organized." Today he still uses his planner.

Since this one teacher made such an impact on Miguel, I asked how he knew that Mr. Frank would be willing to listen to him. He described Mr. Frank as someone who seemed like a person who really cared about his students. He was very personable with everybody in class, and knew everybody's name. Miguel was impressed that he would tell stories about situations that his students from previous classes and previous years had encountered and how he had helped them. Mr. Frank was also the National Honor Society advisor and Miguel belonged to the organization.

Miguel believes that if he had not spoken with Mr. Frank he would have dropped the course, since it wasn't a requirement for graduation. He perceived such a move

would have hurt his self-esteem. “I would still have succeeded, but it would’ve left a scar and perhaps some self doubts about my ability to do it all.” This drive is what continues to keep him going. He wants to be successful in everything he attempts.

Coaches played an important part for students in football because they checked on their attendance daily, and checked with the teachers about their academic standing. “If you weren’t attending classes, they would bench you, or they would give you extra workouts and exercises so there was a lot of encouragement to go to class. They also didn’t put up with gangs and warned us to avoid those areas of the campus and we did.”

For the most part, Miguel was enrolled in honors classes. When he did take a regular class, he saw the difference in the quality of teaching and the behavior of the students. In middle school, he did not see the disruptive behavior he saw in the regular high school courses. Even when there were gang members in his class in middle school, they were respectful of the teacher and listened.

In high school, he noticed a big difference between honor classes and regular education classes. In the regular ed. classes, the students were unruly and the teachers made little effort to control them. He portrayed attending the class as a loss of time for him and other students. “I noticed a big difference in the students’ attitudes from those in my honors classes. In this class, it was a challenge to learn because of all the disruptions and distractions caused by the students.” The students would stand in front of the class and make fun of the teacher and mimic her. At times, the teacher sent them out of the classroom, either to the office or just out.

There were times when I would speak up and ask them to quiet down, or ask them to pay attention. I felt I could do that since some

of them were my friends. Sometimes it helped and at other times, it didn't. They'd just tell me to shut up. Of course that didn't keep me from trying to get them to stop.

The behavior appalled Miguel because his parents had raised him to be respectful, obedient and pay attention. He intervened because he thought it was a good time to spread what he was taught to his peers. It especially bothered him that some of the misbehaving students were his football teammates. The class reminded him of the movie Dangerous Minds. "You bad trouble makers who don't want to learn are making it miserable for the teacher while other students want to learn." This behavior was not what Miguel was used to seeing in any of his honors or advanced placement classes. It was a very different experience, and it made him feel sorry for the teacher.

At Kennedy High School, the principal, or another administrator, announced student accomplishments every morning over the intercom system. In one of the school's main hallways, a special bulletin board contained recognitions that the entire student body could view. When Miguel's team won the national debate competition, the school administration gave no recognition in either forum. This lack of recognition was hurtful to Miguel and the team. Miguel never said anything to the school administration, because he assumed that they had been informed about it. It was easy to see that this lack of recognition still bothers him today.

Peers

Relationships with his peers did not seem to play a big part in Miguel's school experience, so they did not easily influence him. This could be due to the problems he

encountered when he was in elementary school. He had friends on the football team, but he didn't speak about them as close relationships. According to Miguel, he was not a popular person, but his younger brother was more social and popular. Friends more easily influenced his younger brother.

Miguel received invitations to social functions, and attended them. He received invitations to, and attended, parties after the football games. He did not drink at the parties until he was a senior. He participated in the different events held by the senior class and the National Honor Society meetings, and the NHI banquets.

Miguel did make two very close friends through his participation in NHI. They had some things in common, such as their participation in the program, being Latinos, and being high achieving students. Miguel talked them into attending the same university he did even though they had visited two different universities. While in college, the three of them stayed in the same dormitory. He was a roommate of one of the boys. After he left the university, they continued to communicate through email. Today, he still hears from his old roommate.

Dropping Out

Dropping out of school was not an option in his family. Miguel expressed frustration with homework assignments in middle school, because he was taking a lot of honors classes. He was especially frustrated with writing assignments when he made the comment about dropping out to his mother. He told her, "I can't do this anymore! I'm just going to dropout of school! I don't want to do this anymore. It's too hard." This

may have just been the frustrated complaint of a twelve-year-old, but his mother took it seriously. He recalled what she told him, “*Mijo*, that’s not a good thing to say. You can’t dropout of school.” She explained the consequences of dropping out, and then reminded him that he was going to college because that was necessary to get a good job. “As she helped me with the assignment, she’d say something funny to make me laugh and I’d forget about my frustration. Once I was happy, it would change my outlook and I’d get things done. My mother was very good about putting that fire to succeed back in me.”

Miguel did not have any close friends who dropped out of school. He remembered hearing about some of the students dropping out and recalled them as the ones who boarded the bus in the morning with him and then seeing them cross the street away from the school. “They’d be on the bus, just hanging out but not showing up at school.” He did have some friends who expressed a desire to dropout.

When I heard them talk about dropping, a little bit of my mom came out. I encouraged them to stay in school and advised them to find something that interested them and stick with it. We had discussed the Latino dropout rates at the NHI conferences. I was especially concerned because of the negative Latino stereotypes and our dropout rates.”

Miguel’s Mother

Miguel stated that his parents were very influential in his completing high school and college. When I asked if I could interview his parents, he stated that it would be best that I speak with his mom. She had just quit her job and this interview would be “a good thing for her,” he said. When I contacted Mrs. Barrera, she hesitated about setting a meeting time because she wanted her husband to be present. Since he works, she was

concerned about the lateness of the meeting. I explained that I could just meet with her if it was easier. She felt that was best but preferred to meet at a neighborhood restaurant rather than at her house.

Mr. and Mrs. Barrera both graduated from high school in a neighboring city. She has a degree in Spanish and taught for the AISD for three years but decided it was not for her. She had completed one year of college when she got married but didn't finish her degree until the children were already in school. Mrs. Barrera is a quiet, reflective person whose face lights up as she speaks of her family and their accomplishments. She is very proud of all her children and has instilled in them what her own father repeatedly told his own children, "You can do anything you want if you have a good education. Get your education and you'll be set for life!"

Mr. Barrera completed some college hours before the children were born, and also took some courses at the junior college while his wife attended college. He wanted to be a doctor so he applied to medical school but was rejected because of his age. When the boys started middle school, he joined the staff as a parent specialist, resigning from his state job. This was hard on the family because his monthly income decreased. Mrs. Barrera stated that the reason for accepting a lower paying job was that both of them believed that they needed to be involved in giving back to the community. Mrs. Barrera explained that the district adopted many of the initiatives Mr. Barrera started at Rodriguez. She proudly stated that these initiatives are still in place today. Mr. Barrera returned to his original workplace after two years due to the imminent birth of their new baby girl.

While in college, Mrs. Barrera and her friends had read and discussed articles about the importance of the children's early years, and how much better children did in school when their mothers stayed home with them. When Mr. and Mrs. Barrera began their family, they agreed that it was important for the mother to stay home. This meant making sacrifices, but they were willing to do without. She describes it as a time when there were no manicures, beauty shop trips, concerts, plays, or movies. "It was just home routines, but that worked for us."

Even though their income was limited, Mrs. Barrera found opportunities to involve her children in different activities. She read to them at least one book a day, took them to the library's story hour, the park, the museum, and poetry readings. She met other stay-at-home moms and set up play dates for the boys. Physical activity was also very important to her, so she enrolled all the boys in gymnastics and made sure they played outdoors. As they played outdoors, she would teach them number concepts. "Picking up little stones and counting them by ones, twos, fives, or grouping them so they could see the relationships between groups and multiplication." By the time the boys started school, they knew the concepts of multiplication, addition, and subtraction. Since she loved science, they would take exploration walks to examine things they found. Once the boys started school, she made sure they enrolled in after school and summer programs.

The Barreras limited television watching for the children, but they focused on playing board games in the evenings. "Of course there were times when we did watch television. We monitored the programs closely. The kids watched cartoons, movies, but

no MTV.”

Since she had been very shy as a young girl, she wanted them to have opportunities to develop close relationships and acquire the social skills her husband had. He had been an activist and very outgoing in his youth. When the boys were young, they could have one special person to invite over to their house to visit and play. The parents would go get the child and then take him to their home. As they got older, they allowed their children to bring friends home to spend the night. Mr. and Mrs. Barrera wanted to know who their friends were and these methods accomplished that.

Both parents were involved actively in school beyond just attending games, conferences, and other activities in which their children participated. Miguel’s mother served as a member of the school advisory council at the middle school and the Hispanic Mother-Daughter program. Miguel’s father belonged to the booster clubs in both middle and high school, and served as a PTA officer.

Mrs. Barrera saw Miguel as a determined person involved in many school activities and college activities. They describe him as the quiet one in the family. His father often referred to him as a man of few words. Even if he was quiet, he was involved in many things such as football, track, National Honor Society, senior class president, and NHI. Even though his brothers often teased him about his weight when he was little, it didn’t stop him from looking up to them. She didn’t remember his complaining about any teasing at school.

She recounted the many elected leadership positions Miguel attained in college. He was president of the NHI organization and attended conferences in Monterrey,

Mexico and Puerto Rico. When he entered the university here in Texas, he was elected president of the Hispanic student association. “He is very involved, very active. During high school, he’d skip lunch to work on extra projects. He learned extemporaneous speaking, so when he gave the graduation speech, he hit the important points.”

Miguel’s parents say he never gave them any problems and never told them he wanted to dropout. Mrs. Barrera affirmed that it was because his brothers encouraged him to do well. She also attributed their success to the belief in education that her father had instilled in all his children and grandchildren. The one son that gave Miguel’s parents some concern was their oldest son. He was the social one whom Mrs. Barrera referred to as a “social butterfly” like his father. Despite the fact that he loved socializing, he held three part time jobs during college.

Mrs. Barrera recounted the time when her husband had to go to school on behalf of their sons. School staff had told the oldest one to stay home for a day because he didn’t tuck his shirt in after football practice while getting into the car. Another school visit by Mr. Barrera came about after the coach called Miguel a “lazy Mexican.” Mr. Barrera threatened to have him fired if he continued to treat the students in that manner. According to Mrs. Barrera, the coach thought he was motivating the students. Mrs. Barrera is very vocal about going to school immediately if her children experienced any difficulties.

Miguel’s siblings and parents instilled a strong work ethic in him at an early age. Miguel and his brothers were expected to help with the housework, dish washing and cooking. During the summer they worked and saved their money for school expenses.

When Miguel dropped out of the first university, he worked at a local store for a semester saving his money to return to college. During his junior and senior year in college, he worked at a public relations firm.

When I asked her why she thought students dropout of school, she immediately responded, “Money! I think the primary reason is because they have to make money and they feel they’re more useful to their families if they are able to contribute.” She doesn’t know if the schools, or parents, can help once the student decides to dropout. She believes the family is the prime influence. She continued to explain that if there is no support from other family members, the parents can’t do it alone. When Miguel dropped out of college, his father drove to New Mexico to bring him back. They discussed the reasons he had for leaving and what his next steps could be. Miguel never said that he wouldn’t complete his college education. His brothers encouraged him to change his major and to find a school in which he could feel comfortable.

Miguel’s Coach

Since there was no other person that Miguel mentioned other than Mr. Frank and the coaches, I sought to interview one of them. Mr. Frank has retired and was unavailable, so I met with one of Miguel’s former coaches. According to Miguel, the coaches at the schools played an important role in keeping students from joining gangs and failing courses. They supported the players by checking on their behavior in class, their grades, and their attendance.

Mr. Palmer was Miguel’s freshman football coach. He is a stocky, medium

height, gray-haired man, whose eyes crinkle when he smiles. He was sitting at a booth at a local grocery store drinking coffee when we met. He wore a baseball cap and was dressed in casual clothing. When he speaks about football, the athletes, and his coaching and teaching experience, he smiles and gazes away. I could sense how proud he was of his work as he shared the experiences he had as a coach and the role athletics plays in the lives of high school students. Mr. Palmer retired and stated that what he really misses are the students. No matter what mischief they got into, or how challenging they could be, he misses those days in the classroom and on the field.

He remembered Miguel's oldest brother immediately. It was a bit more difficult to remember Miguel. The first thing he stated about Miguel was that he recalled he was an extremely quiet student. "If I heard one word from him all week that was a lot. He was really quiet. He was very different from his brother. He was a better student but they both made honor roll."

Mr. Palmer spoke about the qualities that were desirable in an athlete such as talent, body build, and attitude. Although Miguel did not possess the body structure and build needed to be an exceptional football player, his desire to play and his attitude far surpassed many of the other players. Due to these characteristics, Miguel got a lot of playing time as a freshman. As he moved onto the varsity team, Mr. Palmer recalls that Miguel didn't get as much playing time, but the school recognized his determination and sportsmanship at an awards banquet.

He was a really good kid. He was small for a football player but he had a great attitude. He had the drive to excel and he was one of those guys you can count on. When we called them to line up for drills, he was the first one there. His effort was always outstanding. He had that drive to

get better. I wish we had more kids like him.

The role of the freshman team coach according to Mr. Palmer, was to create enthusiasm, to give the players a lot of individual attention, and to teach them the fundamentals of football at whatever level necessary. They taught the boys that the team was their gang, with their own colors and school signs. They worked on a sense of community by focusing on the importance of helping the person next to them, and the importance of players supporting each other. The students were building relationships with the other team members and with the coaches. The coaches communicated to the team members that they needed to be the best in school because they were ambassadors for the athletic department. Students like Miguel were promoted as ambassadors of the football team to teachers and other students because of his high academic standing and his attitude. Since they asked students to be model students, they role modeled their expectations. One of the ways the coaches themselves promoted athletics to other departments, was by asking them to let them know if students were not doing well academically, or if they were having behavior problems. By instilling these beliefs at home and by the coaches reinforcing them at school, it is easy to see why Miguel was so embarrassed and concerned that the misbehaving students in his class were athletes. This was not acceptable or condoned behavior for football players.

When I asked Mr. Palmer why he thought students dropped out, he listed negative peer influence, falling in love and having to get married, and working to purchase a car in order to claim their independence as examples. He felt that if students got involved in school activities, they would more likely stay in school. They would get

a sense of community and hopefully realize that these were the best years of their lives.

As coaches, they spoke with students often about not becoming “hallway students.” These were the students who hid around the hallways to avoid going to class. The phenomenon begins in the second semester of their freshman year. Mr. Palmer did not see this behavior with Miguel or his brother. He believes that their parents influence and upbringing and their high academic achievement kept them from dropping out. “Miguel was very involved here at Kennedy. He was in National Honor Society, student council, and he was the senior class president.”

Even though Miguel did not directly name Mr. Palmer as a person he could go to, the principles, which he taught, were those that aligned with the teachings of his parents about education. Perhaps Miguel would have gone to Mr. Palmer if he had formed a relationship with him. Mr. Palmer quietly remarked:

Miguel is one of those kids whose name we highlighted when the rosters went out to the teachers because he was an honor’s student and an athlete. Kids like Miguel are so good that you take them for granted because they do what they’re supposed to. You give your attention to the squeaky wheels instead of the Miguel’s. They’re doing everything right and you didn’t give them any attention so you feel guilty. I always knew he’d make it and do well.

Reflection

Miguel has had the support of his family throughout his life. His parents made the decision to have the mother stay home, because they had read it was best for the children. They were advocates as well as encouragers. Even though they were close to their children, they did not stand in their way when others recruited them to attend schools out of state.

Someone in Miguel's high school saw his potential when they called him out to listen to the presentation about the National Hispanic Institute program. Miguel credits participation in this one program as the most positive and significant thing that happened to him. It gave him the courage and self-confidence to pursue other activities not only in high school, but also in college.

Competition was not instilled by his parents but by Miguel himself. His own drive made him competitive with his brothers in football, in academics, and then in leadership roles. He saw himself as a loner and not popular, yet he was elected as a class officer. In leadership roles, Miguel exceeded his brothers. None of his brothers was a class officer or a member of NHI, nor did any one of them hold any office in college as Miguel did. He set high goals for himself and worked hard to accomplish them.

School personnel played a minimal role in supporting Miguel in his efforts to stay in school or to accomplish the goals he set for himself. The one exception was the help and advice that his government teacher gave him. Even though Miguel had been in sports for four years and had formed a relationship with his coaches, they were not the ones he sought out when he had a problem. The one time when he felt he needed and expected recognition, the school administration let him down. They never knew what impact the NHI program he participated in had on his accomplishments.

While Miguel believes he probably would have continued to run for office, he feels that without participation in NHI, he would not have been as prepared to deliver his speech, would not have experienced a standing ovation, or won the election for office. He sought recognition of his leadership skills and his desire to be involved for years, and

did not gain it until his senior year. Miguel never realized that his own persistence made a difference.

CHAPTER V

CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS

This chapter reports the findings from the three case studies. The emerging themes and responses to the research questions are included. As I reviewed the data, I discerned three emergent themes: 1) relationships, 2) a desire to succeed, and 3) support systems.

Relationships

The data showed that the three participants had formed a variety of relationships throughout their school years. The relationships fell into three categories: 1) relationships with parents, 2) relationships with adults at school, and 3) relationships with peers.

Relationship with Parents

Monica, Joseph, and Miguel each had a strong relationship with their parents. They reported that their parents were the most influential persons in their life. They believed their parents trusted them to make good decisions. They could talk to their parents about their problems, and their parents would listen to them. When their parents gave them advice, each one of them was willing to listen and take their advice. Respect for parents is a strong Hispanic cultural value, and the three had a lot of respect for their parents. Miguel made reference to respecting parents and other adults as being part of

the culture. Joseph, Monica, and Miguel had respect for their parents. Joseph referred to his mother as being his role model. He felt that she made sacrifices so that they could get off welfare, and he in turn made some sacrifices of his own to help the family. Monica listened to her parents when they urged her to stay in school. Despite wanting to remain in Austin, she accepted the softball scholarship and attended college as her parents requested. Miguel spoke about his father being his hero and about not bringing certain people home because he respected his parents.

Relationship with School Personnel

Misconceptions and problems occur when students lack understanding about how to interpret the behavior and interactions of their teachers. Through their ability to reach out to adults, and their ability to negotiate the school culture, these successful students developed positive relationships with one or more adults at school. They were able to identify persons in whom they felt they could confide and trust when they were having problems at school. They nurtured the relationships in these ways: assisting the teacher, or staff person with tasks; performing well in class; gaining their teacher's trust; being honest with them; and discussing problems with them and taking their advice. Joseph interpreted his teacher's recognition of his academic performance and good behavior, and his teacher assigning him to help others as signs of a positive relationship based on trust and respect. When they were having difficulties in school, each went to a person they had identified as the one to help them. Monica had a very close relationship with her assistant principal. She described him as someone she could trust and who trusted

her. She described him as caring about students and trusting them. Miguel identified the teacher he went to for help as someone who cared about his students. The teacher told them stories about former students, the challenges they faced, and how he helped them. Miguel interpreted this behavior as that of someone who cared about his students.

These students' relationships with their teachers led them to being nominated to different organizations, prevented them from dropping out, helped them to cope with bullying, and brought them positive recognition for their efforts.

Relationship with Peers

Valenzuela (1999) reported that successful students often demonstrated good social skills. Students who are successful in school choose groups that support their views of who they are in the context of the school. This is especially important because student cultures in school are very powerful in influencing student behavior. Monica, Joseph, and Miguel formed relationships with their peers from their own ethnic group as well as from outside their ethnic group.

For Monica, peer relationships were extremely important. During the time she was at Monroe, she missed some of her peers. When she arrived at Addison, she found the majority of her friends were there. Her best friend at Addison influenced her decision to remain in school instead of following her boyfriend's advice.

All three established relationships with peers with whom they had things in common and whom they believed had the same goals, or the same problems as themselves. The peers they chose were usually club members, sports members, honor

classes members, or relatives.

Peer influence was powerful in both positive and negative ways. Joseph was harassed because he made friends with students from his honor or advanced academic placement classes. This led him to develop closer relationships with peers from his neighborhood. However, when choosing those friends he made sure they had goals similar to his. Gang members in middle school attempted to recruit Miguel, and football players in high school encouraged him to drink at parties. He declined membership in the gang, and avoided drinking at parties by not attending until his senior year. He developed a strong friendship with Mexican American peers who participated in NHI and had the same goals he did.

Desire to Succeed

The desire to succeed was very strong in all three participants. The qualities they demonstrated to be successful fell into four categories: 1) problem-solving abilities, 2) determination, 3) self-efficacy, and 4) competitiveness.

Problem-solving Abilities

As they encountered negative remarks from teachers, problems with peers, and issues of unfairness, their ability to problem solve was an important factor. They made decisions about avoiding certain situations, how to inform a teacher that they were giving the students the wrong information, and when to go to their parents for help. They had to overcome negative peer pressure that encouraged such things as gang

participation and skipping school, and that also discouraged doing too well in school. Monica had to contend with pressure from her boyfriend who wanted her to leave home and quit school. Miguel's football buddies urged him to attend parties where alcohol was easily obtained. Joseph's friends ridiculed him in the neighborhood because he was in honors or advanced placement classes. The students coped with issues such as unfairness and poorly prepared teachers. Miguel's coach ridiculed him, and Monica's coach didn't give her an opportunity to play on the varsity team. When Joseph and Miguel attended regular classes rather than honors classes, they felt they didn't learn as much. This was due to the teachers' lack of discipline and control in their classrooms. The choices the three faced could have had a positive or negative result. These students made the hard, correct choices most of the time.

Determination

Monica, Joseph, and Miguel had the desire and determination to succeed in whatever they did in school. They each faced difficult situations but were determined to overcome them. Monica wanted to be a star player in volleyball but the coach placed her on the B team. When she went to Addison, she immediately tried out for and attained a place on the A team. Miguel ran for class officer every year until his class elected him. Joseph worked hard to achieve recognition by excelling in writing, and receiving it when he made a perfect score on the TAAS state test.

The three faced dropping out of school either in high school or college. Although Monica and Joseph were on the verge of dropping out of school, their determination to get a high school diploma overcame the desire to leave school. They

had decided long before that a high school diploma was of some value to them. Their parents had instilled this in them at a very young age.

For Miguel, the challenge of staying in school came after he graduated from high school. Once he decided to drop out of one university, he had the determination to continue looking for a school that he felt was right for him. It never entered his mind not to complete his college degree. His parents encouraged him and allowed him to stay home during the summer, in order to work and save money for tuition.

Self-Efficacy

Monica, Joseph, and Miguel had a strong sense of self as they spoke about their strengths and accomplishments. They developed self-efficacy and the social skills necessary to be successful in school. When they had challenges, the three knew when it was time to ask for help and who to go to for the help needed. This is a characteristic that is oftentimes not valued in classrooms and can be a risk rather than a protective mechanism for students.

Monica sought help when others bullied her. She used her knowledge of school expectations to seek help before getting into a fight and her positive interactions with the Assistant Principal to determine whom she would go to for help. As a freshman, she immediately identified the adult in school whom she could go to if she needed help.

Joseph sought help after being out of school for a month at Franklin. He was not afraid to go to the school administrators and ask for help in evaluating his course work in order to graduate.

Miguel asked for help when he became overwhelmed with the amount of work he had. He had evaluated his teachers and decided which one would be the most likely to help him.

Mexican American parents teach their children to use these help-seeking behaviors when problem-solving. Joseph and Monica received help and advice from family members when they thought about dropping out of high school. Miguel received help and advice from his parents when he thought about dropping out of the university.

Competitiveness

All three participants had highly competitive natures. They competed in different arenas, either with others in the school, or with their siblings. This inner drive to be the best at what they do gives them the strength to overcome challenges. Monica was very vocal about being a better volleyball player than the girls who played on the varsity team at Monroe. Joseph evidenced his competitiveness through academics. He was outspoken about being smarter than other students in his class, helping the teacher out, and correcting teachers' errors. Miguel was forthright about having good public speaking skills. He stated that if given an opportunity to express himself, he could win class elections. When he was a senior, his classmates recognized his speaking skills with a standing ovation after his speech during the senior class officer elections. He competed with his brothers not only in sports but also in academics, since his role model was his extremely bright brother.

Due to their competitiveness, the participants earned recognitions that made their

families and others take notice. Monica received a softball scholarship to a small college. Miguel graduated in the top ten percent of his class, and received a full paid scholarship to attend an out-of-state university. He also became a mentor for NHI students at the university. Joseph received a different kind of payoff that was very important to him; he received acknowledgment from his teachers for his academic prowess over those of his peers, and he gained the trust and respect of his mother.

Support Systems

Delgado-Gaitan (1990) states that students who have the confidence to garner the support of their teachers, peers and parents have a sense of power in their lives. The three participants identified three support systems that had an impact in their school lives: their parents, their school, and their peers.

Parent Support

Monica, Joseph, and Miguel understood very clearly from their parents that dropping out of school was not an option for them. They knew that if there was a problem in school, they could count on their parents for help. The three participants cited different ways their parents showed that they valued education, and their expectations about finishing school.

The parents of Monica and Miguel set clear expectations in similar ways about graduating. They took an interest in what was happening at school, and their grades; they talked with them about school, and they listened. They encouraged their children in their endeavors. In addition, they showed support by making accommodations in order

to attend all their children's activities, dividing their time among their children as necessary. They took action on behalf of their child by going to the school and advocating for them. If anything happened at school that required their presence, they were there. The parents knew whom to contact at school and did not hesitate to talk to teachers, coaches, or administrators about problems. They knew how to negotiate the school system when they or their children were having problems. Both sets of parents were actively involved in the school through sports clubs, Parent Teacher Associations, and volunteering. They attended meetings and conferences dealing with their children's progress. The parents knew their children's friends and allowed their friends to come to their homes. At times, they became surrogate parents to their children's friends. They set limits and always knew where their children were, or knew where to look for them.

On the other hand, Joseph's single parent was not actively involved in the school in some of the same ways that Monica's and Miguel's parents were involved. She was the only means of support for the family. She worked full time during the day and also put in some overtime. She showed her interest by inquiring about their schoolwork and their school day. She asked about their homework as soon as she came home from work. Her expectation was that their schoolwork be completed by the time she came home. She provided them with materials they needed for school and encouraged them to do well. She checked their report cards and commented on their grades. She expressed her expectations about going to school and graduating.

School Support

The support from the school staff came in the form of school programs offered,

and in the form of staff support. The staff support came through the development of relationships they built with the participants. The participants saw staff showing support when they made positive comments to them about their work or the work of other students, when they recognized their achievements, or when they recommended them to different programs such as National Honor Society.

For the participants involved in sports, their coaches were significantly important. The coaches provided structure and expectations for them. Through the sports programs, they found teammates that had some of the same interests and values they did. The coaches supported their academic efforts by expecting them to be present in class and making good grades. They offered advice about peer pressure and were not hesitant about letting them know how they felt about gang participation. If they did not meet the expectations, consequences ensued.

The high school offered several support programs for students. All three high schools provided the DELTA program. The DELTA program was first implemented in 1996. The program is described as open-entry, open-exit, competency-based diploma program to recover former dropouts and to prevent students at risk of dropping out from doing so. The school district created opportunities for students who left school for a period of time, were absent from classes for a while, or lacked course credits to complete their course work.

During the three-year period that DELTA was evaluated, the data showed that prevention of dropouts increased. In 1998-99, there were 1,711 students enrolled in the DELTA program, 17% were former dropouts and 70% were considered prevented

dropouts because they earned enough credits to graduate. The three schools in the study had participating student in the DELTA program (see Table 1).

Table 1. — Total Number of Students Served by Campus and Type in 1997-98 & 1998-99

Campus	Recovered Dropout		Prevented Dropout		Served	
	97-98	98-99	97-98	98-99	97-98	98-99
Addison	89 (31%)	53 (17%)	203 (71%)	253 (82%)	286	305
Franklin	75 (33%)	38 (16%)	187 (83%)	192 (83%)	286	231
Kennedy	16 (12%)	2 (1%)	64 (46%)	59 (49%)	138	120

The DELTA program in the district served students in ten high schools. The proportions of students served in each ethnic group remained virtually unchanged over the three-year study (see Table 2).

Table 2. — Number and Percentage of Students Served by Ethnicity, 1996-97, 1997-98, & 1998-99

Year	African American	White/Other	Asian	Hispanic
1998-99	352 (20%)	544 (31%)	37 (2%)	773 (45%)
1997-98	317 (20%)	508 (31%)	32 (2%)	761 (47%)
1996-97	348 (23%)	479 (32%)	20 (1%)	667 (43%)

Note. 1997-98, approximately 49% of the students participating were seniors.

In 1998-99, 1,399 students who participated in the program and passed the required TAAS tests the first time. This was 86% of the students in the program. The district also reported that district-wide 289 of the recovered dropouts 19% received a high school diploma and 25% of the prevented dropouts earned diplomas (see Table 3). The self-paced DELTA Program afforded two of the participants a way to make up their deficiencies and graduate on time in 1997-98 and 1998-99.

Table 3.— Number and Percent of Students Graduating, 1996-99

Target Population	High School Graduates		
	96-97	97-98	98-99
Recovered Dropouts	94 (20%)	112 (24%)	56 (19%)
Prevented Dropouts	218 (27%)	326 (30%)	307 (25%)
Total	312 (25%)	438 (28%)	363 (24%)

Note. The numbers represent the number of high school diplomas received by students in the target populations district-wide.

One high school was very instrumental in supporting one of the participating students through their support of the National Hispanic Institute program. The support from the high school came in the form of assistance in identifying the high achieving Hispanic students on campus, and providing the names of the students to organization representatives. The high school also provided the organization a place to meet on Sundays. The NHI provided support for participating Hispanic students in the program

by training these high achieving Mexican American students in leadership skills and creating opportunities for them to aspire and enroll in a higher education institution. The program created a network system for high achieving Hispanic students to support each other and interact with students who had the same goals and interests.

The relationship the NHI had with the business community and universities provided students with scholarship money, and dropout recovery programs. The relationship with the universities also made it possible for the students not only to aspire to a college education, but also to attend a university with which they were already familiar.

Peers Support

According to Gibson et al (2004), relationships with their peers play decisive roles in students' decisions about how well they do in school. Many times youth today spend more time with peers than they do at home; so their peers become significant influence. The peers, or peer group, that the participants chose as best friends, were important in providing them with support.

Through the interviews, it was clear that Monica, throughout high school, sought and received from her best friend and peer group a great deal of support and encouragement. She received support when she thought of dropping out, and when problems with gang members occurred. When one of the group members thought about dropping out, the peer group talked them out of it.

The students from NHI were a significant peer group for Miguel. He discussed

receiving support from the senior class officers when he was class president; but these support systems were not close relationships. In elementary school, he relied on the support of one peer to help him get through the hard times. In high school, he described himself as a loner; but he did have teammates to support him. Joseph saw himself more as a loner and did not have a strong peer group that he could identify as a positive support system. The peer group he chose to associate with did have an interest in graduating from high school, but high academic performance was not their goal.

Summary

This chapter reported the findings from the three case studies and the three emerging themes. The themes were consistent with descriptions of resilient children. Resilient children have support systems, strong relationships, and a desire to succeed.

Relationships that influenced the participants to be successful included the relationship with their parents, their peers, and some school staff. These relationships were strong and very influential during their school lives.

Desire to succeed drove the participants to accomplish what they wanted and helped them to overcome challenging situations. The qualities they demonstrated were problem-solving abilities, determination, self-awareness, and competitiveness. These qualities gave them the ability to interpret and negotiate the school culture successfully.

Support systems in place for the participants came in three different forms: parent support, school support and peer support. The parents supported their child's education directly or indirectly throughout their school life. School support came from

programs as well from some staff members directly or indirectly. This is consistent with the findings of successful Latinas and Latinos by Fine & Weis (1999). Gibson et al. (2004) found that adolescents who connect with peers have support needed to mediate the necessary resources to be successful in school. The participants sought and received support from their peers when they needed it. One garnished support from peers to have a successful prom, and another sought out a friend to talk to about boyfriend pressures. One received support from a peer, who, like him, had been teased about his weight. Both of them supported each other while in elementary school. The student that participated in the NHI program received support from other participants; and he also supported and encouraged other members during high school and college.

As a fourth generation Mexican American who grew up in a small city next to the Mexican border, I shared many of the cultural mores of the Mexican American parents and participants I interviewed. As I studied and reviewed notes on interviews, observations, and reflections, this shared cultural perspective, even though it may be biased, helped me to interpret what those interviewed did not explicitly state. Tacit knowledge of the school culture also provided me an opportunity to examine what school personnel said in the interviews, what I observed, and what I did not hear.

In the Mexican American culture, everyone understands certain obligations to family (Carrasquillo, 1991). For example, the expectation and practice of respect for elders, especially our parents, throughout our lives are an early-learned lesson. Problems that occur are not openly discussed with those outside the family circle, which may include extended family such as aunts, uncles, grandparents, and cousins. On the other

hand, proud family members loudly announce and share accomplishments. No one places blame on the parents for the failures of the children; and no one discloses to outsiders from other cultures issues concerning child rearing. For this reason, I was not surprised that I only heard about how much the participants respected their parents' efforts and that they were always there for them.

Even though Joseph's brothers had been in legal trouble and his sister was a single mom, he never criticized any of his siblings. He spoke very little about his injured brother except to share the positive things he could do. He was always cautious about what he disclosed about his family. He portrayed them in a positive light and protected his mother from being judged. He referenced any disclosure with comments about her being his role model and his admiration for her determination to get them out of poverty.

Monica only shared that problems existed in her marriage, and that she and one brother had given her parents some problems but did not disclose much about them. During follow-up visits, she always returned to her own experiences in high school and never disclosed her own learning challenges.

Scheduling interviews with the participants' mothers was challenging. In the Mexican American culture, women to a certain extent, even today, make sure that their husbands approve of certain things they do. Knowing this, I wondered if they wanted to have their husbands present because they didn't know me, or because their husbands truly wanted to be present. When I met with Monica's parents, they had, at the urging of Mrs. Delgado, made a decision before my arrival that they were going to be really open and tell the truth. Mrs. Delgado took the lead in the discussion; and when Mr. Delgado

seemed to hold back, she would insist that he tell everything.

Mrs. Barrera met with me alone, and she was very cautious about what she shared. She discussed many positive experiences and did not disclose too much about herself. Most of the time, she focused on the accomplishments of her children, her husband, and her father; yet this is a woman who received a full paid scholarship to a very prestigious college. She appears to be a very shy person but one that does not tolerate work conditions that she does not support. This was apparent when she briefly stated that she had taught, and that her son wanted to go protect her from students' misbehavior, and when she did not discuss why she was no longer working. When she spoke about injustices in schools, there was a spark in her voice. It was easy to see that she would not hesitate to speak up on behalf of her children.

Did the parents trust the schools? It did not appear that they felt the schools were going to do what was best for their children. This came through when the Delgado's commented about not believing what the teachers said about their son being a slow learner. Mrs. Barrera was subtler about this issue; she described the decision for Mr. Barrera to work at the middle school that his sons attended and take a reduction in pay as "a way of giving back to the community." In previous years, they had given back to the school community by being actively involved in the Parent Teacher Association in elementary school; that could have been a way to stay involved in middle school without losing income. Their children's success can be attributed to their involvement and interest in their schooling as parent (Fine & Weis, 1999; Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Romo & Falbo, 1996; Valenzuela (1999).

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter provides a summary of the research project and a description of the purpose and design of the study. Following the summary section, I describe conclusions reached about the results of the study. The final section includes the recommendations for practice, and recommendations for further research.

Summary of the Research

The interest in conducting the study came from my concern about the increasing dropout rates among Mexican American students. As an educator it was especially disturbing that as the most populous ethnic group in the United States, Hispanics were not becoming prepared to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. As I studied the research, I found that Mexican American students were dropping out with more frequency than other Hispanic groups. As a Mexican American, I wanted to learn more about what made students like my father, a third generation, low socioeconomic Mexican American college graduate, successful while so many others were failing. I delved into the following questions: what factors contributed to Mexican Americans staying in school, what support systems were there to help the students be successful, and what challenges did they encounter? Since I work in the Austin Independent School District, I decided to conduct the research in our district to see what practices held promise to support Mexican American students.

The review of the literature about second and third generation Mexican American

students succeeding in school was limited compared to literature about immigrant students succeeding in school. As I reviewed the literature, many times I found that there was not a differentiation made between second and third generation Mexican Americans from the schooling experience of immigrant Mexican Americans. Some of the literature on Hispanic schooling issues, dealt with a variety of Hispanic groups: Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and Mexican Americans. An abundance of literature cited reasons why Hispanics dropout, but few cited reasons why Hispanics stayed in school. However, more recent research focused on successful schools in school districts with high concentrations of Mexican Americans. In the more recent studies, the researchers did distinguish between recent immigrants and generational Mexican Americans (Fashola, et al., 1997; Rumsberger, 1991; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999). Many of the schools cited in this new research served both immigrant students as well as second and third generation Mexican American students.

Since the research I found highlighted practices from schools in other districts, and other parts of the country, I wanted to examine the success stories of low socioeconomic second, third, or fourth generation Mexican American students in the Austin I.S.D. Being a school administrator, I believed this would provide me an opportunity to listen to former students' perspectives on their experiences, understand the challenges students encountered, and what educators in my situation could do to help students stay in school. According to the state reports, the dropout rates in the Austin I.S.D. were declining, but Hispanics were still the largest ethnic group dropping out.

I used a qualitative case study approach to examine the experiences of three low

socioeconomic Mexican American students from three different high schools in the Austin I.S.D.. The selected participants attended schools in the A. I. S. D. throughout their school years. The three participants selected were second or third generation Mexican American students that graduated no fewer than five years from the beginning of the study. The reason for the five-year requirement was the desire to have the participants reflect as adults on their experiences rather than as graduates fresh out of high school.

The purpose for using a case study approach was to better examine subjective accounts of the schooling process by the participants. The in-depth interviews were the main source of data collection. I conducted numerous interviews with the participants, their parents, and significant others identified by the participants. This allowed me to delve into the minds and lives of the participants as I explored what kept them in school.

I audio taped all the interviews and wrote reflective notes after each interview. I transcribed the tapes after each interview and reviewed the notes from my observations, and reflections in order to generate additional questions and reflect on what might be missing. It gave me an opportunity to listen to what the participants were saying and not saying. I reviewed and categorized the collected data in order to generate emerging themes.

As a fourth generation Mexican American educator, I am aware that my experiences and knowledge of cultural norms and school norms bias shared constructions, observations and interpretations of interviews. I reflected on my own experiences as I interpreted what I observed, heard, and was not being stated. I reflected

on reasons things are done at school in certain ways, or how my own family overcame obstacles. When I met with the parents of the participants, it was like hearing the voices of my own parents all over again. The mother of one of the participants stressed the importance of continuing on to college as my parents often did with my brothers and me. She believed that as a parent, her role was to support and encourage her children to be successful. She talked about the hardships she went through to graduate from school and about the time she almost dropped out, and her father's strictness. It reminded me of the stories my father recounted about the hardships he encountered going to college and also about the expectations that my parents had set for my brother and me. My own mother was a high school dropout, who nagged my father until he completed his Master's degree, and then she obtained her GED at the age of 60. As I spoke with the parents of one participant, their comments about their role as parents in helping their children be successful in school and life mirrored the beliefs my parents had about their role with their children. Like the three participants, I was fortunate to have parents that valued education and communicated that to my brothers and me constantly.

Two of the challenges I encountered were locating the graduates, since many of them had moved, and getting a time to meet with the selected participants because of their work schedules or their not returning phone calls. One participant was particularly hard to reach for initial interviews and then for member checks. Numerous excuses and failures to appear at agreed-upon meeting times complicated the completion of the case study. The parent of one participant would only speak to me on the telephone. Though that interview was not very long, the information provided was rich, and useful for the

triangulation with other data. I understood her hesitance in sharing information about her family since she did not know me but I was very disappointed. I had thought that since I myself was Mexican American she would be willing to meet with me. In the Mexican American culture, disclosing painful parts of ones life is not encouraged. The circumstances before and after the tragic accident would be very painful for her to relive and something not to be shared with outsiders. This was evident because after I spoke with her, the participant did not return my numerous calls.

Conclusions

When I began this research, my focus was to find what factors kept low socioeconomic Mexican American students from dropping out, what caused them concern during their school years, and what educators could learn from their experience that perhaps could help keep Hispanic youth in school.

Alva & Padilla (1995) state that not all adolescents who live in economically disadvantaged environments develop psychological problems or experience academic difficulties. The reason for that is that studies on invulnerable children suggest that to a large extent resiliency has contributed to their success. They cite that resiliency depends on two key issues: 1) the attitudes, skills, and knowledge the children possess, and 2) the number and type of environmental resources in place to provide support and to alleviate stress. In addition, Romo and Falbo (1996) listed attitude, social skills, and knowledge as some key characteristics in resilient students who were successful in school. Monica, Joseph, and Miguel had the attributes of resilient children. They had a

desire to succeed, together with strong social skills and the ability to problem-solve. They were competitive; they set goals; and they formed relationships with others. They also had the support of their parents, peers, and school personnel or school programs. These qualities and resources enabled them to be successful high school graduates in the Austin I.S.D.

First Conclusion- Control

During my interviews with each former student, they disclosed the lack of safety in the school, being teased by other students, unfair treatment by teachers, or teachers who couldn't control their students. This led me to begin thinking about how they overcame the negative situations that they encountered. The three had resilient attributes of successful students, but what did they do and why? I found that the three had a sense of control and had confidence in themselves. They controlled who they associated with at school, what courses they took, and who they would ask for assistance when they needed it. They felt confident about their ability to be successful in whatever they decided to do at school. Lueng, 1994 states that external sense of control influences the amount of effort and persistence put forth by individuals in taking on challenges daily, including the schooling experience. When each of the participants didn't feel they were being successful, they took charge and were in control. They acquired the knowledge and social capital to navigate the school. Stanton-Salazar cites that students from low socioeconomic families gain social capital from middle-class peers and adults in such settings as advanced placement classes, extracurricular activities, clubs, or sports. The

participants had either been involved in sports since middle school, or in honors level classes since middle school.

The three also knew what good teachers did and could describe their behavior. They commented that they knew that they would get a better education if they took honors classes instead of the regular track. The lack of expectations on behalf of the teachers was not an issue the students discussed. The parents never made any derogatory comments about the schools, or the quality of the instruction provided to their children. Yet, the participants spoke about the differences they saw in the quality of teaching and learning between regular classes and honors, or advanced placement, classes that they took. They described their own behavior as being what teachers expected. No matter how much I probed about teacher behavior, the participants did not blame the teacher for the lack of rigor or expectations in some classes. They attributed their teachers' behavior to their novice status or to the students' lack of knowledge of the school norms. Perhaps the participants were self-conscious about criticizing or expressing concerns about the school district or the school staff because they knew I was an educator in the district.

Second Conclusion- Relationships and Support

Gibson, et al. (2004) state that a sense of fitting in coupled with access to the types of adult and peer social capital can enhance academic success for students. As I analyzed the data, the importance of relationships and supports from others aside from their parents was clear. All three participants communicated the importance of having a

good relationship with peers and/or school staff. They each believed that the adults in the school were there to help them so they reached out to adults to help them. Miguel's received support from his teacher when he needed to get organized and from the school when they supported NHI. NHI provided the avenue for Miguel to gain the confidence and skills he needed to win the recognition he yearned to get as a class officer.

As educators, we are the environmental resources students need to be able to understand the school norms. We often forget how important it is to reach out to students and form relationships with them. School personnel may be so busy focusing on curriculum and state assessments that they forget to look at students as individuals. Or perhaps they feel vulnerable to libelous criticism about their relationships with students. This may be especially true for males, perhaps except coaches, and novice high school teachers who may be only five years older than their students. There is a way to provide support to the students if we fear that close relationships may be inappropriate. Gibson et al. (2004) also found that school clubs can be a source to build social capital needed "to connect with those 'others' who can open doors and provide the resources required for academic success." (p. 131) Two of the participants were very involved in school organizations and used their knowledge of school to develop relationships and to understand the school culture.

Third Conclusion – Parents Value Education

Both high-and low-achieving Mexican American children's parents have the expectation that their children will graduate from high school. The difference between

them is that some of them may lack the knowledge or skills about how to help their children (Okagahi & Frensch, 1998). Parents who graduate from high school are more likely to be involved actively in children's education because they know how to communicate their needs to the schools and advocate for their children (Rumsberger, 1991). The parents of the three participants had graduated from high school in the United States and knew how to communicate their needs and concerns to school personnel. They knew how to negotiate the school system on behalf of the child since they themselves graduated from high school. The parents communicated to them, from a very young age, that an education was important. They took their parental responsibilities seriously. They set rules and expectations, made sure they knew their children's friends, and checked on their school progress. The three participants did not see dropping out of school as an option. Each described the relationship with their parents as close and based on trust, respect, and caring. Even when there were differences with their parents, each wanted to make their parents proud of their accomplishments. They recognized that their parents were their strongest advocates. This finding is consistent with the research of Romo and Falbo (1996b).

Fourth Conclusion: Parents Receive Help From Others

According to Delgado-Gaitan (1990), students in high school depend on their peers more today than in years past. The participant with the strongest peer group support and the most pressure to leave school was Monica. Through powerful support from her best friend, her teammates, her parents, and her assistant principal, she

overcame her boyfriend's influence and made the decision to stay in school. Monica's case is a strong example of why positive relationships with teachers or other school staff, are extremely important. The partnership formed by the parents and the assistant principal helped keep her in school. The respect and friendship of the males in the neighborhood were important to Joseph's survival in the *barrio*, so he garnered support of his friends whose goal was to finish high school. His mother's support, his own belief that the way out of poverty was by getting a good education, and the availability of the DELTA program in his high school helped him graduate.

The three high schools provided support to the students through programs such as the DELTA program, the NHI, the National Honor Society, and the sports programs. I found that the coaches at the secondary level impacted the students in significant ways. They took an interest in the students' attendance, behavior, and peer group. They teach students what is necessary to be successful in school and support parent's efforts to keep their children in school. The NHI program is no longer operating in any of the A.I.S.D. schools at present but it is being implemented in schools in a district close to A.I.S.D.

Final Thoughts

The participants continue to have a strong relationship with their parents. They visit weekly and when they have needed help from their parents, it was readily available. I interpreted the weekly visits to their parents as a characteristic and expectation of their Mexican heritage. When talking about still helping their children, one participant's parent stated, "That's what we do in our culture, right?" None of the participants except

Miguel ever discussed or acknowledged cultural beliefs or practices. Only the two males made references to their ethnicity. Some of the literature I reviewed stated that third generation Mexican Americans do not consider themselves Mexicans (Romo & Falbo, 1996; Valenzuela, 1999); but I did not get a sense that any of the participants had a problem with their ethnic heritage. The parents communicated the cultural norms through their actions, but did not identify them as such to their children. They did not teach their children Spanish even though they themselves spoke it. Their success in school may also be due to acculturation to the dominant culture.

Parents today need help in fighting the negative influences from peers that their children encounter. Today students are alone for hours because parents have to work late hours, so they need support from school staff and other adults. Parents cannot fight on their own a negative school culture, or low expectations for students in a school. Many parents are working long hours and are not at home when the children get home. Fewer of them are staying home to take care of the children.

For low socioeconomic parents, the decision to stay home is not an option. The number of single parent families continues to rise, and parents must depend on children watching each other. Children need to have someone they can trust and turn to at school on those occasions when their parents, or extended family, are not available. When their only support comes from siblings who are babysitting them, the children may fall prey to gang recruitment because the gang members disguise themselves as family.

In my experience growing up in a Mexican American community, our parents taught us that the school was an extension of the home. Parents in the community told

their children to listen to the teacher as if she were a second mother. Similarly, parents expected the teachers to know each child as their own. This cultural norm of forming relationships and caring for the student was an unstated expectation of parents. This was evident when Monica's parents complained about the school not calling them when their son was missing classes. Valenzuela (1999) cites that teachers at the high school she studied fell prey to anesthetic caring, emphasizing form over content, instead of being empathetic to the student who needed to learn how to navigate the culture of his school community.

As educators, we must recognize that a student may be resilient at certain critical moments but not at others. In order to strengthen the protective processes of students so that they can face challenges such as gang recruitment, poor teachers, and other outside forces influencing their performance, the students need the support of other adults in addition to their parents. Teamwork is what works: parents and school staffs all being invested in the success of all students

Recommendations

Recommendations for Practice in the Austin Independent School District

Educators can make a difference in creating successful, caring schools by removing the obstacles that get in the way of student success. The students who succeeded in this study had very strong resiliency characteristics, but not all students have those behaviors. We see many vulnerable children in schools, but educators can be the special people who make a difference in their lives. As educators, it is our

responsibility to nurture students and provide them with quality instruction. We need to be empathetic toward our students. They do not need teachers to lower their expectations and treat them as “pobrecitos,” or “losers” because of their home situations, their socioeconomic situations, or their lack of self-discipline. Lewis-Charp, Yu, and Friedlaender (2004) cite that educators need to think of relationships with the school environment as transformational. These relationships require investment of time and effort. With this in mind, I have listed some recommendations that may have a positive impact on reaching students that are considered at risk of not succeeding because of their socioeconomic level and cultural differences. These recommendations will serve not as the final answer to meet the needs of all students, but perhaps as a beginning toward that end:

1. Provide staff development for school staffs on the importance of building relationships with students and parents, and how to communicate with parents.
2. Provide staff development for school staff on successful practices with Mexican American students as well as books studies on successful schools.
3. Create schools that provide a safe, nurturing environment, and have academically rigorous learning environment in every classroom, where students are challenged, and where teasing and gang recruitment is stopped.
4. Continue the DELTA program; implement and support the NHI program or other similar programs for Hispanic students.
5. Examine practices for electing class officers, informing students about

participating in Honor Society, in student council, and the like.

6. Provide a variety of extracurricular programs to help students feel that they belong to a group and that helps students remain in school (chess clubs, running clubs, debate clubs, as well as others.)
7. Meet with parents and discuss their aspirations for their children and form partnerships to achieve goals.
8. Create opportunities for parents and teachers to meet at less formal events than teacher/parent conferences such as parent coffees with the principal; evening potluck dinners to communicate programs or state assessments; go on Neighborhood Walks; make home visits.
9. Create a friendlier environment during parent conferences by offering coffee or cookies to parents.

Recommendations for Further Study in the Austin Independent School District and Other School Districts.

The need for additional research to increase the number of students graduating from high school and effective interventions is great. The Hispanic population is so diverse that there is a need to continue to examine factors that make specific groups successful.

1. Research what factors contribute to low socioeconomic Mexican American girls staying in school.
2. Research the factors that contribute to second or third generation Mexican

American females succeeding in college.

3. Research what high school programs contribute to successfully retaining low socioeconomic female students in school.
4. Research the impact of high school sports programs in helping low socioeconomic students successfully graduate from high school.

Final Thoughts

I felt an urgency to find out what factors made people like my father succeed despite all the hardships he encountered. I assumed that if I found that answer, I would have a greater impact in the lives of my students. As an educator, I wanted to discern what helped them, but selfishly I was hoping to hear what a great difference teachers and schools had made in their lives.

Instead, from the stories of these invulnerable young adults, I learned the precarious role we have in the success of our students. The three came to our schools with protective resources that had been nurtured by their parents before starting school. They had a caring adult, or adults, to provide support when they most needed it. The support of their parent made them resilient but that was not enough. At different times, parents needed the help of other people. This emphasizes the importance of finding ways to foster the students' resilience instead of creating obstacles and problems, and also highlights the need to examine our own views regarding low socioeconomic and minority students, and their parents. Do we see their strengths? Do we understand their culture and the culture of poverty? If students don't have positive relationships with

adults in the school, they may not be able to resist the risk factors they encounter.

The research studies of Hispanic dropouts would predict Joseph as the student most likely to dropout. Despite being from a low socioeconomic single parent family, removed from the home for a time, not involved in extra curricular activities, and having a history of high mobility, he made it. Joseph had a caring parent, but he also had great determination to be successful. He believed that a good education was the key for a better job and hence a better life. Unfortunately, he did not have the resources to go to college, but he continues to educate himself.

In education, we implement a multitude of programs trying to find one very special one, or one very special strategy, that is going to help us cure all ills. We are under so much pressure to insure that students pass TAKS that we forget to build relationships. As Mr. Cruz stated, “All three are important: Rigor, Relevance, Relationships.” Today the Austin I.S.D. is working on high school redesign to form smaller learning communities in order to improve curriculum and student-teacher relationships. Perhaps we are headed in the right direction.

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APPENDIX A

CASE STUDY QUESTIONS

Selection Interview Questions

Interviewer will ask the following questions to those contacted for possible participation in the study. If the answer to questions 2 and 3 are “yes”, the participant will be selected for participation in the study.

1. When did you graduate from _____ High School?
2. Did you ever participate or qualify for the lunch program at any time while you were in school?
3. Are you Hispanic? (If yes) What Hispanic group are you from? Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban

Participant Interview Questions

I am researching the lives of Mexican American students who were successful in school. I am interested in hearing your experiences because they will contribute to our understanding of what makes students such as yourself successful. This will contribute to the research about successful Mexican American students. I will ask you some questions to generate a discussion and stimulate thoughts.

1. What are you doing today? Do you think schools prepared you well? Tell me about your school experience in general.
2. What was it like for you in elementary school? What were you like in school? What about in Middle or Junior High School? What do you think you were like?
3. Did you have a job during school? If yes: Tell me about it? How did you manage a job and school? How do you think you did academically?
4. Can you tell me about any events you would call “significant” in your school life?
5. Tell me about your teachers. What were they like or what do you remember about them? Who else do you remember in school?
6. What programs or activities were you involved in/with?
7. Why do you think you stayed in school? What kept you going?
8. Was there ever a time when you thought you really wanted to drop out?
9. Can you remember a time when one of your friends wanted to dropout or did dropout? How do you feel about that?
10. Why do you think your friend(s) dropped out of school? Do you think anybody could have done anything to keep them from dropping out?
11. What did you like to do in your spare time? What do you like to do now?

12. Is there anybody you would recommend that I talk to that you feel really knows you well? your experiences?

Interviewer may generate other semi-structured and unstructured questions as the participants talk about things. A naturalistic inquiry method is to delve into the responses as necessary in order to construct meaning in the context of the study.

Interview Questions for Key Informants Parents

Interviewer will tell the person interviewed the purpose of the study, interview and procedures:

I am researching the lives of Mexican American students who were successful in school. I am interested in hearing your experiences with (participant) because they will contribute to the research to help us better understand what makes students successful. This will contribute to the research about successful Mexican American students. I will ask you some questions to generate a discussion and stimulate thoughts.

1. Tell me about, what is he/she like?
2. What was he/she like as a child?
3. Who were his friends?
4. What did he/she like to do? After school, weekends, in his spare time, during vacation/holidays.
5. How do you think did in school? How did he/she feel about school?
6. Did he/she ever complain about not wanting to finish school? If yes: How did you keep him/her from leaving school? Why do you think this happened?
7. What was your school experience like?
8. How involved you were you at school? Did you get to go to his/her school?
9. Can you remember a time when you had to go to school about some problem?
10. How were you informed about what was going on at school?
11. Why do you think he/she was successful in school?
12. Why do you think some kids quit school?

13. How did the rest of your children do in school or are doing in school?

Interviewer may generate other semi-structured and unstructured questions as the participants talk about things. A naturalistic inquiry method is to delve into the responses as necessary in order to construct meaning in the context of the study.

Interview Questions of Key Informants

Others

I am researching the lives of Mexican American students who were successful in school. I am interested in hearing your experiences with (participant) because they will contribute to the research to help us better understand what makes students successful. This will contribute to the research about successful Mexican American students. I will ask you some questions to generate a discussion and stimulate thoughts.

1. Tell me about yourself?
2. Do you remember (participant)?
3. What do you remember most about him/her?
4. How well did you know him/her?
5. Why do you think they gave your name?
6. How well did you know his/her family? Tell me about them.
7. What made them successful?
8. What do you think makes some students successful and not others?
9. Why do you think some students drop out of school?
10. What type of support systems did these student have, if any?
11. What do you think schools can do to help low income students be successful?

Interviewer may generate other semi-structured and unstructured questions as the participants talk about things. A naturalistic inquiry method is to delve into the responses as necessary in order to construct meaning in the context of the study.

APPENDIX B**INFORMED CONSENT FORMS**

*Case Studies of Low Socio-Economic Mexican American High School Graduates
in the Austin Independent School District: Why They Didn't Drop Out*

(Date)

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in a research project focusing on successful Mexican-Americans who graduated from high school and what makes them successful. I am contacting you because you are one of the success stories.

My name is Lucila Diaz Duncan and I am a doctoral level student at Texas A & M University in the department of Educational Administration. I am requesting your help with a research project that focuses on successful former low socioeconomic Mexican-American students who graduated from the Austin Independent School District. The purpose of this study is to explore and learn about the journey of academically successful Mexican-American students and what makes them successful. I am interested in this research because Hispanics, particularly Mexican-American youth, are the highest school drop out population in our country today.

I am contacting students of Hispanic heritage who graduated from (High School). Your name was given to me by (former teachers, principal, and/or counselor). If you agree to participate, you may be selected to be one of three subjects asked to participate in the in-depth study. The participants selected will each be from a different high school in the Austin ISD, of Mexican-American heritage, and from a low socioeconomic background. The in-depth study would involve interviews with you and persons you identified as having an impact on your decision to stay in school. Any information obtained will be confidential and there will be no way of your being identified from any results reported in this study. Your comments will not be shared with other participants, and you can refuse to answer any questions asked of you and still continue to participate.

If you are interested in learning more about the study and being considered for in-depth participation, please call me at (512) 416-1479, or (512) 841-2549, or email me at nicdun@ccsi.com.

Sincerely,

Lucila Diaz Duncan

Participant Consent Form
*Case Studies of Low Socio-Economic Mexican American High School Graduates
 in the Austin Independent School District: Why They Didn't Drop Out*

I have been asked to participate in a research study about the journey of successful Mexican-American high school graduates. I was selected to be a possible participant because I successfully graduated from high school. A total of three participants has been asked to participate in this study. The purpose of this study is to find out what keeps some Mexican-Americans in school while their peer's dropout before graduating from high school. Why did I stay in school instead of drop out?

If I agree to be in this study, I will be asked to talk about my experiences and answer questions. During the interviews, I can be audio taped only if I give permission, and if I do not want to be taped, I can still participate in the study. I understand that it may take approximately six visits for interviews and each interview will be approximately 45 minutes long. I also understand that the risks associated with this study are minimal and all information will be kept confidential. There are no direct benefits to me for participation but perhaps the information will help educators to keep Hispanic students in school.

This study is confidential since all responses will be coded and no one will know my name or the school I attended. No identifiers linking me to the study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be stored securely and kept private. Only Lucila Duncan, the investigator, and Dr. Linda Skrla, her professor, will have access to the records and to the audio tapes which are being used for note taking purposes. The audio tapes will be erased three years after the completion of the study. My decision, whether to participate in the study, will not affect my current, or future, relations with Texas A & M University, or the Austin Independent School District. If I decide to participate, I am free to refuse to answer any questions that may make me uncomfortable. I can withdraw at any time without my relation with the university, jobs, benefits, etc., being affected. I can contact Lucila D. Duncan at (512)416-1479 or (512)841-2549 (nicdun@ccsi.com), or Dr. Linda Skrla at Texas A & M University, 529 Harrington Tower, College Station TX 77843, (979)862-4198, (lkra@tamu.edu) with any questions about this study.

This research study has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board-Human Subjects in Research, Texas A & M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding subjects' rights, I can contact the Institutional Review Board through Dr. Michael W. Buckley, Director of Research Compliance, Office of Vice President for Research at (979)845-8585 (mwibuckley@tamu.edu).

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers to my satisfaction. I have been given a copy of this consent document for my records. By signing this document, I consent to participate in the study.

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

Permiso De Participación en el Estudio
*Case Studies of Low Socio-Economic Mexican-American High School Graduates
 in the Austin Independent School District: Why They Didn't Drop Out*

Me han pedido que participe en el estudio acerca de estudiantes mejico-americanos que han demostrado éxito en completar la escuela secundaria como mi hijo/hija. Me han solicitado por que mi hijo/hija es un Mejico-Americano que graduo de la escuela secundaria. Entiendo que el proposito de este estudio es para ver que le ayudó a el/ella obtener su determinación para graduar de la escuela.

Yo estoy de acuerdo de participar en este estudio por medio de entrevistas, o sea platicas. Estoy dispuesto(a) a contestar preguntas acerca de características y opiñones que yo tenga sobre de este tema y mi hijo/hija. Si no quiero contestar alguna pregunta, tengo el derecho de decirle y no me afectará mi participación en el estudio, o la de mi hijo/hija. Las entrevistas, o sea platicas, serán nomas tres y durarán de 30 a 45 minutos cada vez.

El estudio es confidencial y se que mi nombre no se usará y las notas que se tomen se mantendrán en archivo privado y nomás Lucila Duncan y la profesora, Dra. Linda Skrla, tendrán aceso. Mi decision de querer o no querer participar no afectará mis relaciones, o las de mi hijo/hija, con la universidad de Texas A & M, o con el distrito escolar de Austin. Yo puedo retirar mi participación a cualquier tiempo sin que mis relaciones con la universidad, o el distrito sean afectadas. Si tengo alguna pregunta puedo comunicarme con Lucila Duncan al (512) 416-1479 o (512) 841-2549, (nicdun@ccsi.com), o con la profesora Dra. Linda Skrla, Universidad de Texas A&M, 529 Harrington Tower, College Station, TX 77843, 979)862-4198, (lkra@tamu.edu).

Este estudio ha sido revisado y aprobado por la Mesa Institucional de Revisos-Subjetos Humanos en Investigaciones, Universidad de Texas A&M. Para problems o preguntas acerca de estudios y derechos de participantes, puedo comunicarme con el Dr. Michael Buckley, IRB Coordinator, Office of Vice President for Research and Associate Provost for Graduate Studies al (979) 845-8585, (mwbuckley@tamu.edu).

He leído la información incluida aquí. He preguntado preguntas y estoy satisfecho(a) con las respuestas. He recibido una copia de este consentimineto para mis archivos. Al firmar esta forma, doy me consentimiento de participar en el estudio.

Firma: _____

Fecha:

Firma de Investigadora: _____

Fecha:

Consent Form

Case Studies of Low Socio-Economic Mexican-American High School Graduates in the Austin Independent School District: Why They Didn't Drop Out

I have been asked to participate in a research study about the journey of a successful Mexican-American student and what made him successful. I was selected to participate because I was identified as a key informant by the study participant. The purpose of this study is to find out what keeps some students from dropping out of school specifically Mexican-American youth.

If I agree to participate, I will be asked to participate in interviews. There will be a total of three or less each lasting 30 to 45 minutes. The risks associated with this study are minimal since the names of the participants will not be used.

This study is confidential since the names will be coded and the records will be kept private. No identifiers linking me to the study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be stored securely and only Lucila Duncan and Dr. Linda Skrla will have access to the records. My decision whether or not to participate will not affect my current or future relations with Texas A & M University, the Austin Independent School District. If I decide to participate, I am free to refuse to answer any of the questions that may make me uncomfortable. I can withdraw at any time without my relations with the university, job, benefits, etc., being affected. I can contact Lucila Duncan at (512) 416-1479 or (512) 841-2549, (nicdun@ccsi.com), or Dr. Linda Skrla, Texas A&M University, 529 Harrington Tower, College Station, TX 77843, (979) 862-4198, (lkra@tamu.edu) with any questions about this study.

This research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board-Human subjects in Research, Texas A&M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding subjects' rights, I can contact the Institutional Review Board through Dr. Michael Buckley, IRB Coordinator, Office of Vice President for Research and Associate Provost for Graduate Studies at (979) 845-8585 (mwbuckley@tamu.edu).

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers to my satisfaction. I have been given a copy of this consent form for my records. By signing this document, I consent to participate in the study.

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

Participant Consent for Audio Taping
*Case Studies of Low Socio-Economic Mexican-American High School Graduates
in the Austin Independent School District: Why They Didn't Drop Out*

I voluntarily agree to be audio taped during the interviews being conducted by Lucila Duncan. I understand that the tapes will be used only for the purpose of capturing accurate information and only Lucila Duncan, or her professor, Dr. Linda Skrla, will have access to them. These tapes will be identified by subject number. The tapes will be kept for 3 years at Ms. Duncan's home in a locked cabinet. After data is collected, the tapes will be erased in 3 years.

Signature of the Subject _____ Date _____

Signature of Investigator _____ Date _____

Refusal to be Audio Taped
*Case Studies of Low Socio-Economic Mexican American High School Graduates
in the Austin Independent School District: Why They Didn't Drop Out*

I do not agree to be audio taped during my interviews conducted by Lucila D. Duncan.
She may use field notes taken during our interviews. By refusing to be audio taped, I
understand that I may continue to participate in the study.

Signature of Subject _____ Date _____

Signature of Investigator _____ Date _____

VITA

Lucila Diaz Duncan
2135 Barton Hills Dr.
Austin, Texas 78704

EDUCATION

B.S. Elementary Education	Texas Woman's University, 1965
M.Ed. Educational Administration	Sul Ross State University, 1976
Ed.D. Educational Administration	Texas A&M University, 2006

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

1998-2006	Principal, McBee Elementary School, Austin ISD
1986-1998	Principal, Widen Elementary School, Austin ISD
1985-1986	Assistant Principal, Cook Elementary School, Austin ISD
1981-1985	Principal, North Heights Elementary School, San Felipe-Del Rio Consolidated ISD
1974-1981	Program Coordinator & Instructional Supervisor, San Felipe-Del Rio Consolidated ISD
1972-1974	Teacher, San Felipe-Del Rio Consolidated ISD
1968-1970	Teacher, Garfield Elementary School, Del Rio ISD
1965-1968	Teacher, Raymond Brewer Elementary School, San Antonio ISD
1964-1965	Teacher, Sarah King Elementary School, San Antonio ISD

EDUCATOR CERTIFICATIONS

Mid-Management Administrator
Professional Supervision
Provisional Elementary - General
Provisional Bilingual
Provisional Kindergarten

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Austin Association of Public School Administrators
Texas Elementary Principals Association
Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development
Texas Association of Hispanic School Administrators (1996-2000)